



3-D SOVIET STYLE

Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

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Development Canada

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State of Research

- Russian assessment inadequate
- DRA officials memoirs in Dari
- Most studies usually portray Soviet experience in negative terms or dismissed it outright as irrelevant
- Focus usually on the military campaign
- Discussion of Soviet COIN as comprehensive effort (military, economic development and state building experience) virtually non-existent



Presentation Overview

- Relevance of Soviet Experience
- Defence – military ops
- Development – social, political, economic
- Diplomacy – internal efforts
- Conclusion – Lessons (to be) learned



Chronology of Soviet Engagement

- 1979 Soviets invade & bear brunt of fighting
- 1985 Increased Afghan Army role
- 1986 Soviets limit combat operations
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal



The Costs

Soviet Union

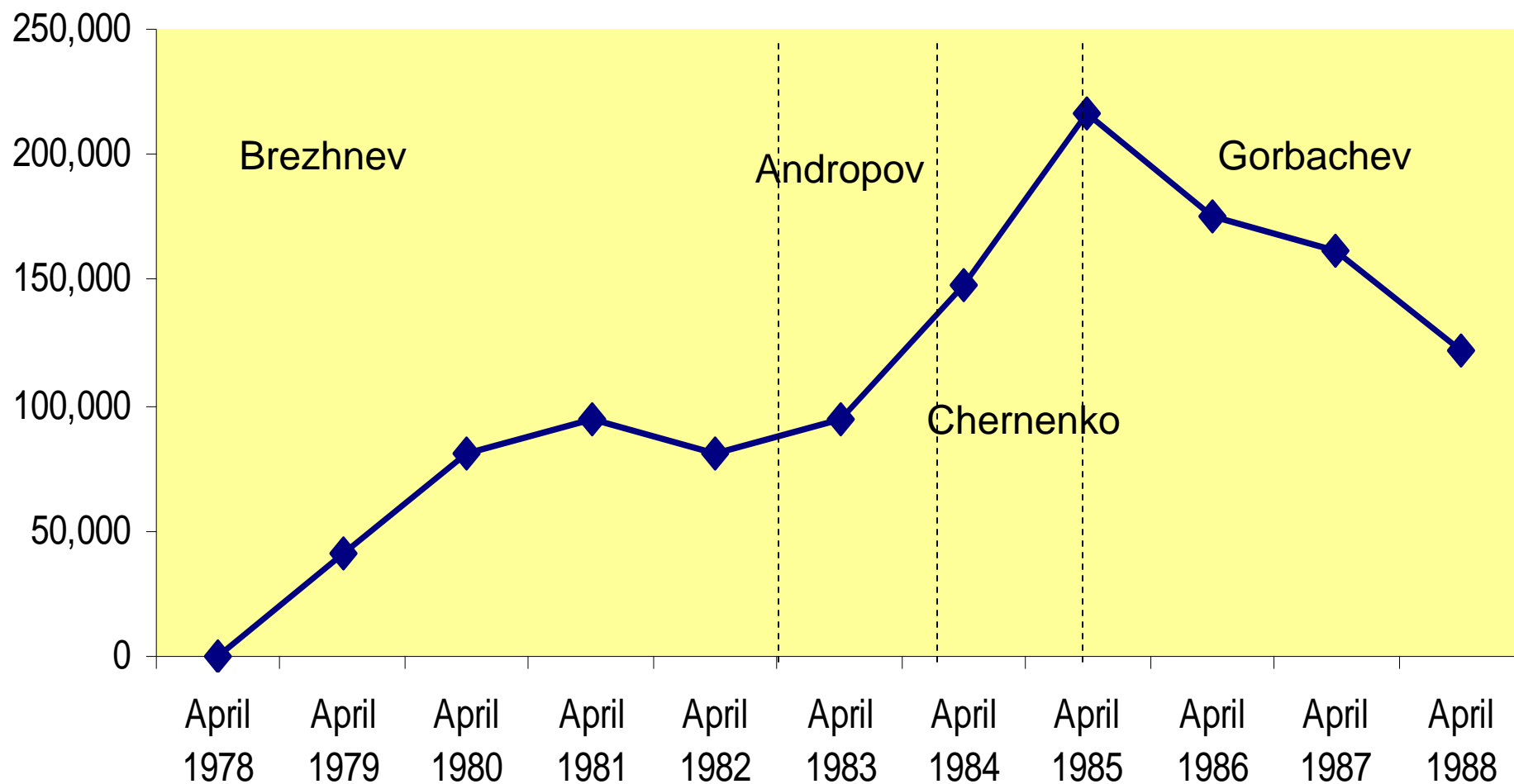
- Killed..... 15,000
- Wounded..... 54,000
- Illnesses.... 416,000
- Political failure

Afghanistan

- Killed ...1-1.3 million
- Refugees.....5 million
- Civil war, failed state



Afghans Killed per Year





Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Afghan geography
- Ethnic & social divisions are persistent
- Basis for state legitimacy still very elusive
- The border with Pakistan



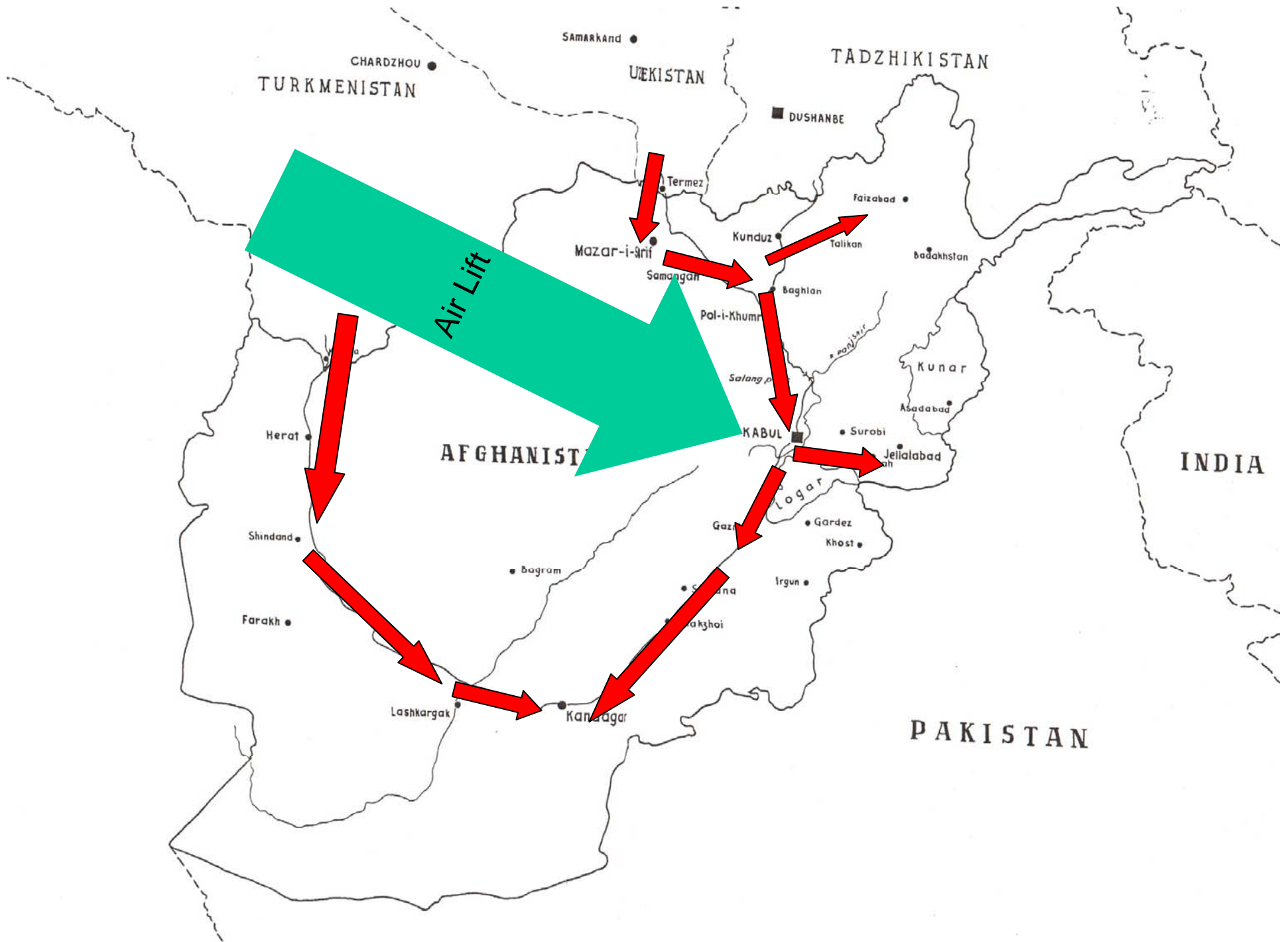
Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Military presence needed to provide security to the new regime
- Challenge of balancing military ops with civil affairs
- Underrated insurgency – culture of resistance & the ideology of Jihad
- “Limited Contingent”



Military Ops - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
 - Elusive and decentralized enemy
 - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
 - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- Overriding principle - minimal casualties



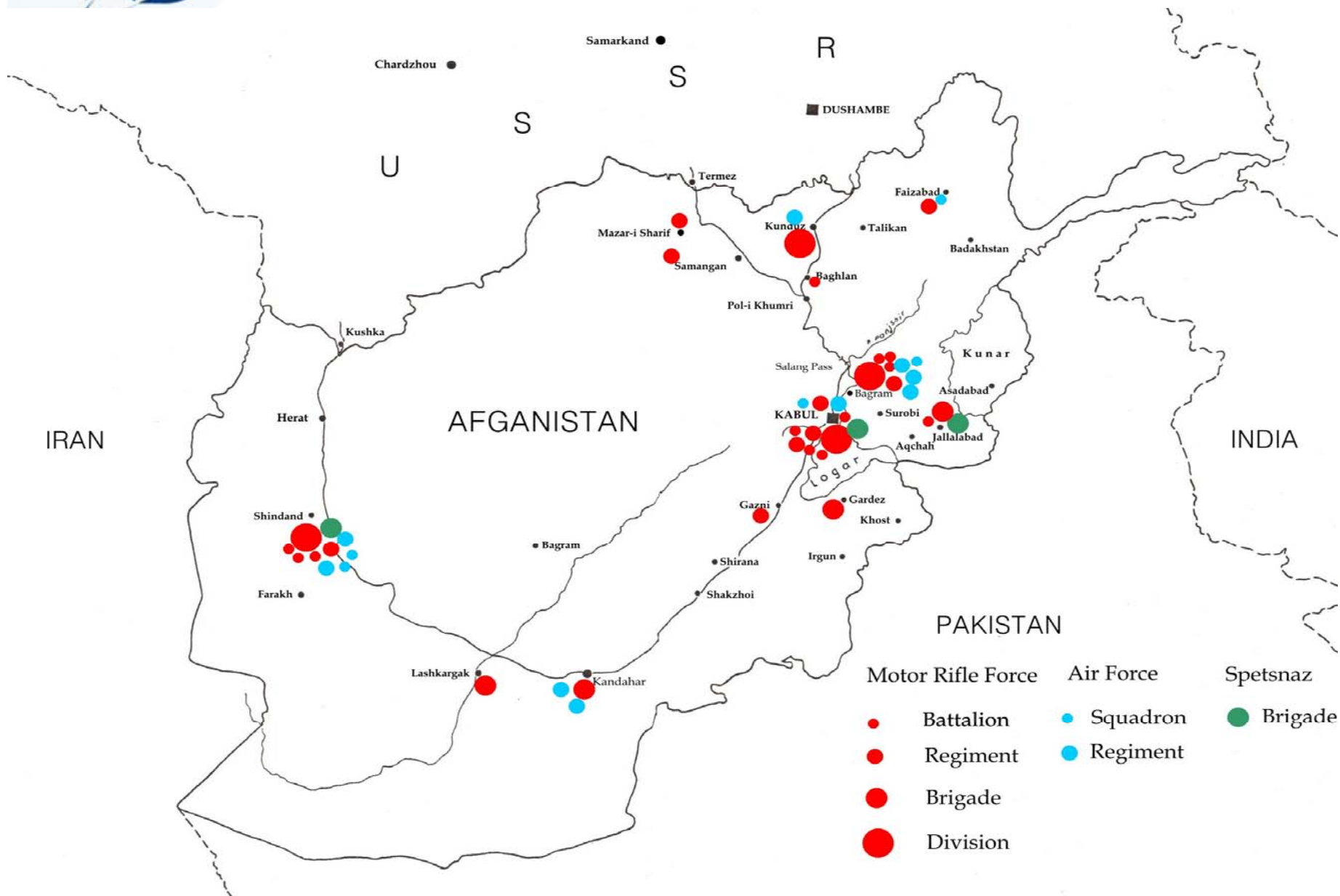


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Soviet Bases





Defence - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
 - Elusive and decentralized enemy
 - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
 - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- **Overriding principle - minimal casualties**



“The War of the Roads”

- Mujahidin’s standard tactics: the road ambush & road mines/ IEDs
- Blocking roads - a strategic goal: Mobility / re-supply & Afghan economy critically affected
- Soviets devote large forces to route protection
- Mujahidin mine/IED ops sophisticated: plastic mines
- Losses due to mines: 11,289 trucks, 1,314 APCs, 147 tanks, 433 artillery pieces, 1,138 command vehicles



Mines & Ambushes





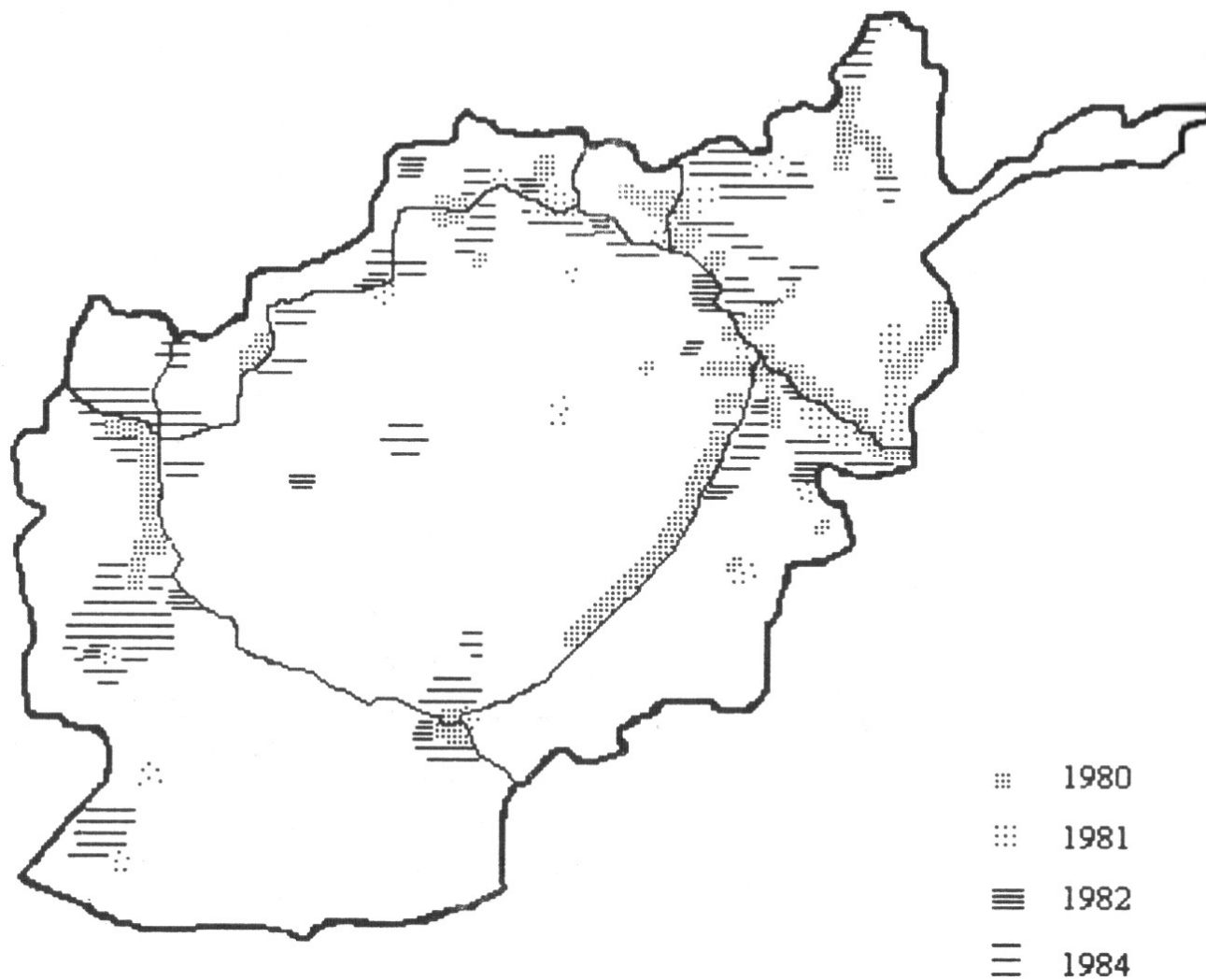


Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



Military activities 1980-84





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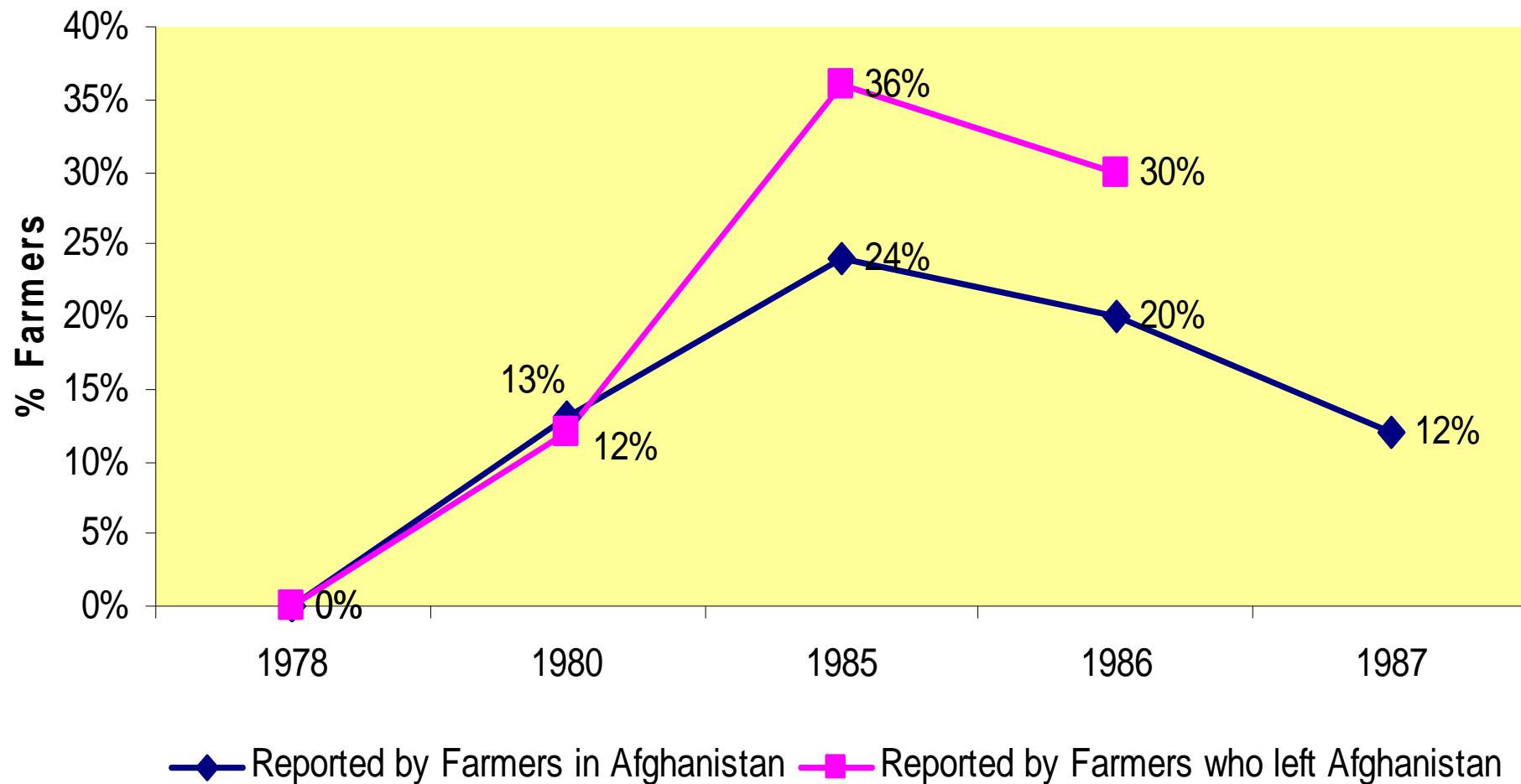
Soviet Counter-Insurgency Approach

“I hold it a principle in Asia that the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on your enemy.”

General M.O. Skobelev,
Conqueror of Turkestan, 1881

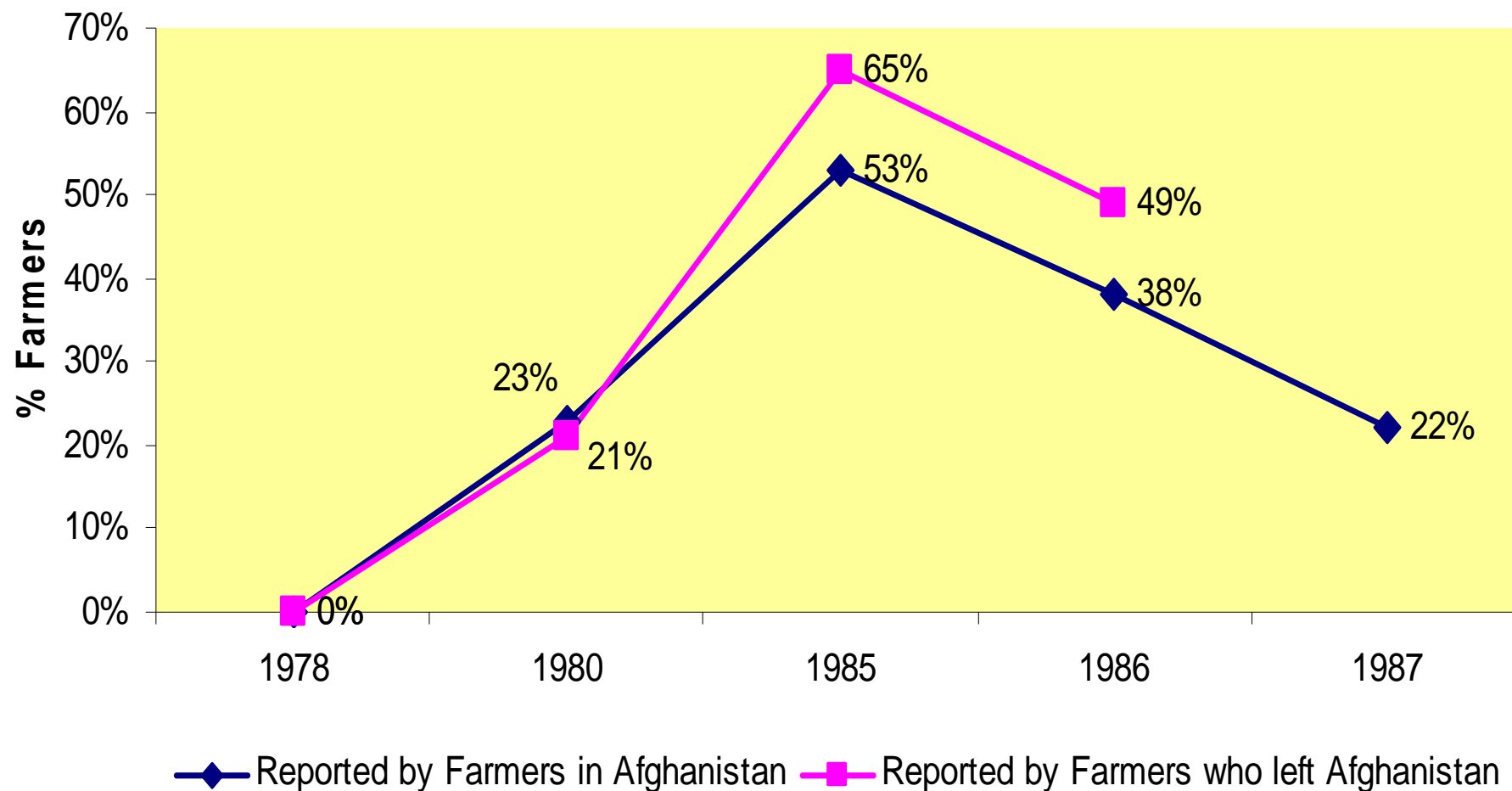


Effects of War - Destruction of Irrigation





Effects of War - Bombing of Villages







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**Fayzabad, Village Sari, The regiment's command
in negotiations with the local elders**





Soviet solders and “friendly” mujahidin. Ceasefire



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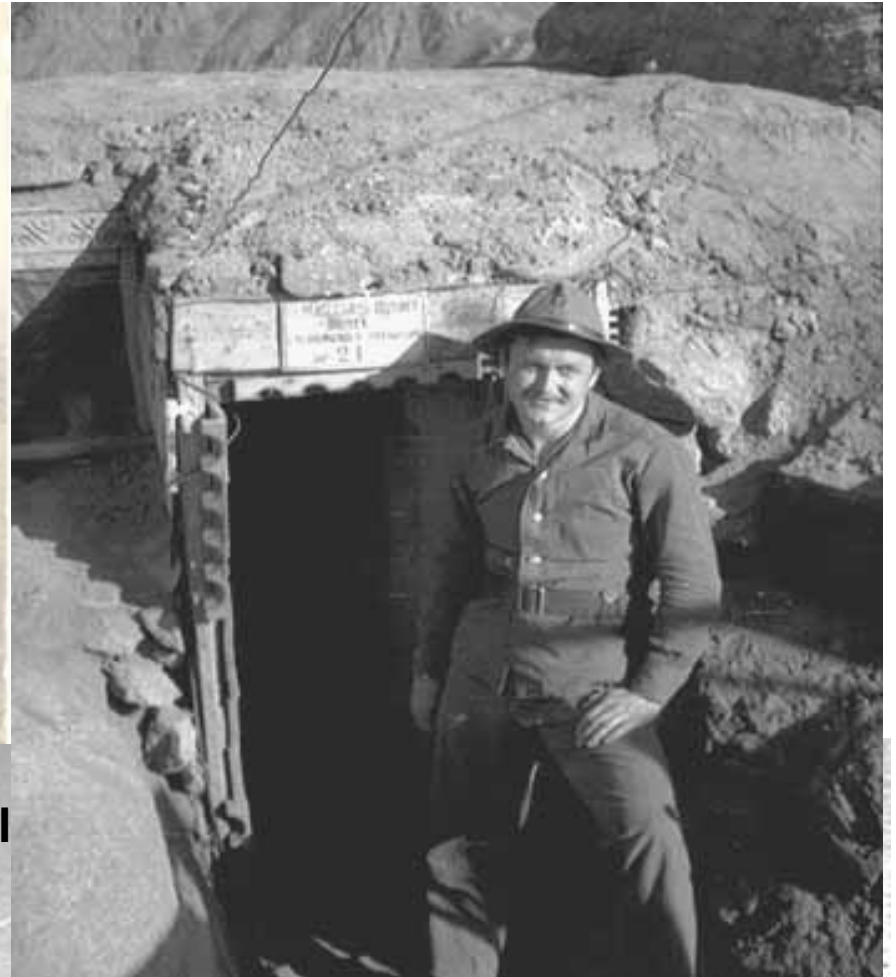


Outpost 21, Rukha, Panjshir Valley





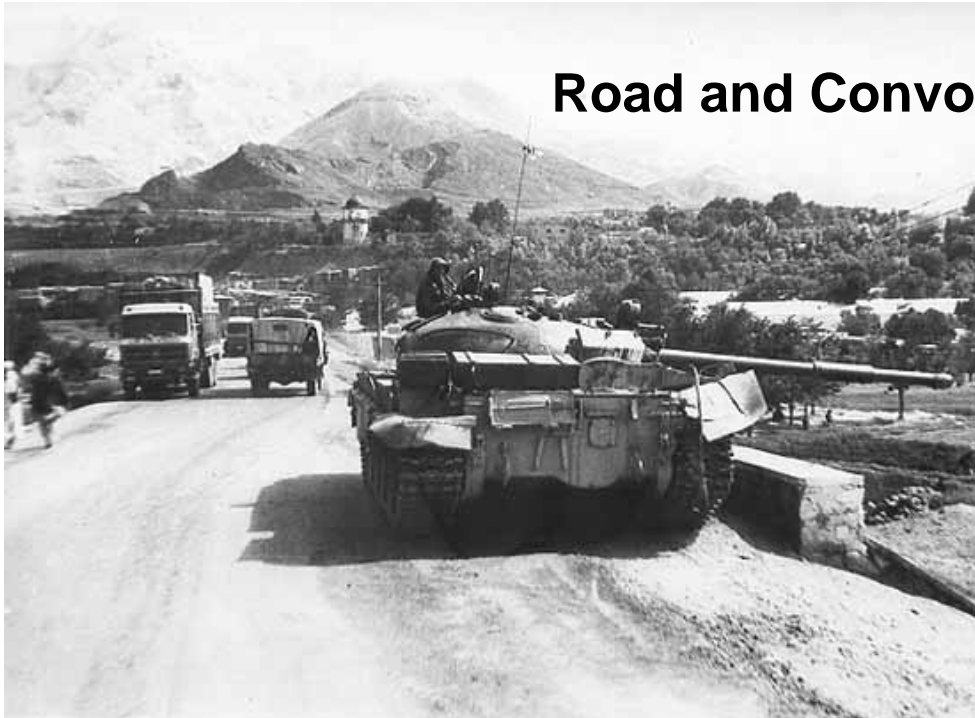
**Post 21's helicopter landing and radio-signal
interceptor**



The command point



Road and Convoy Security Posts



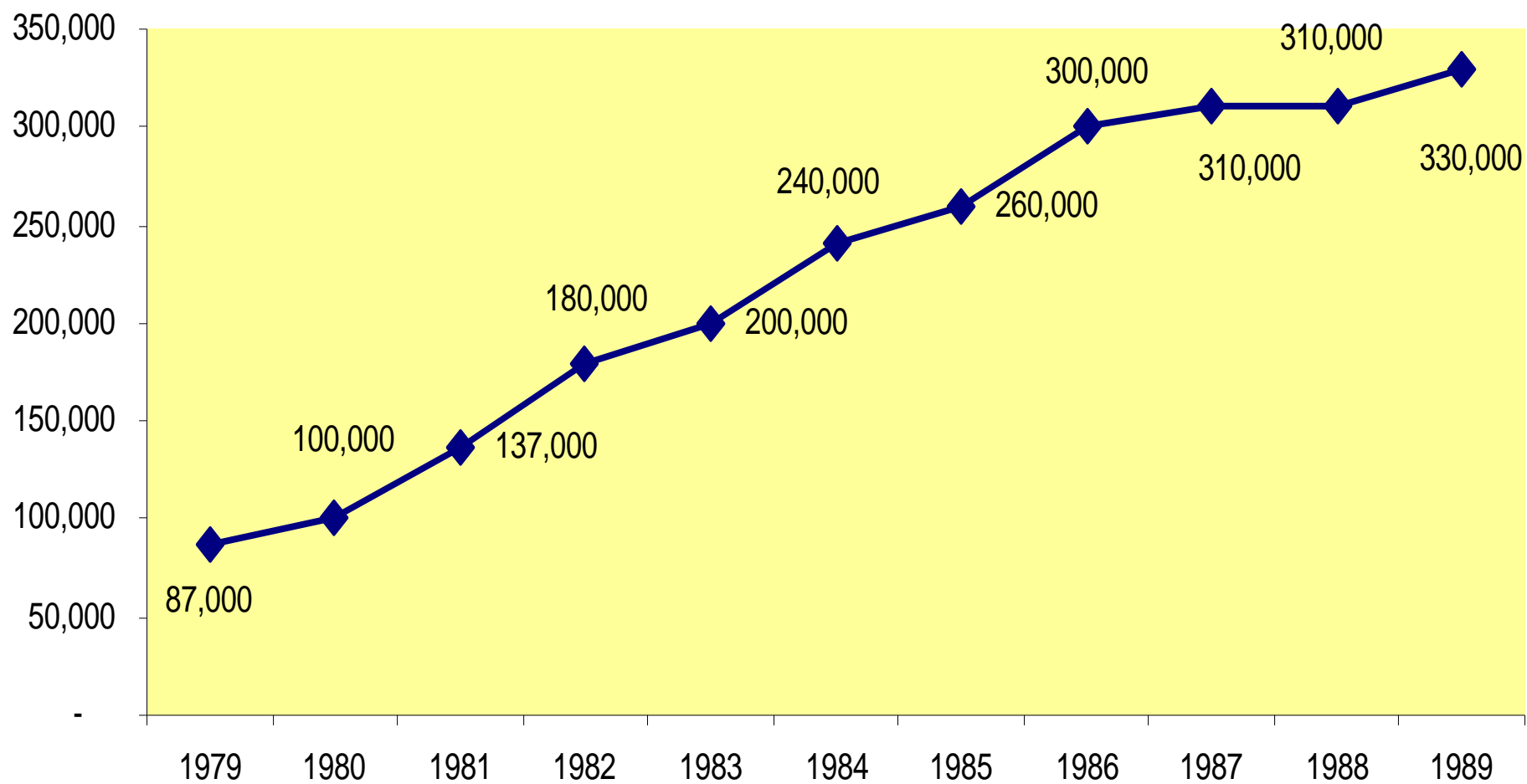


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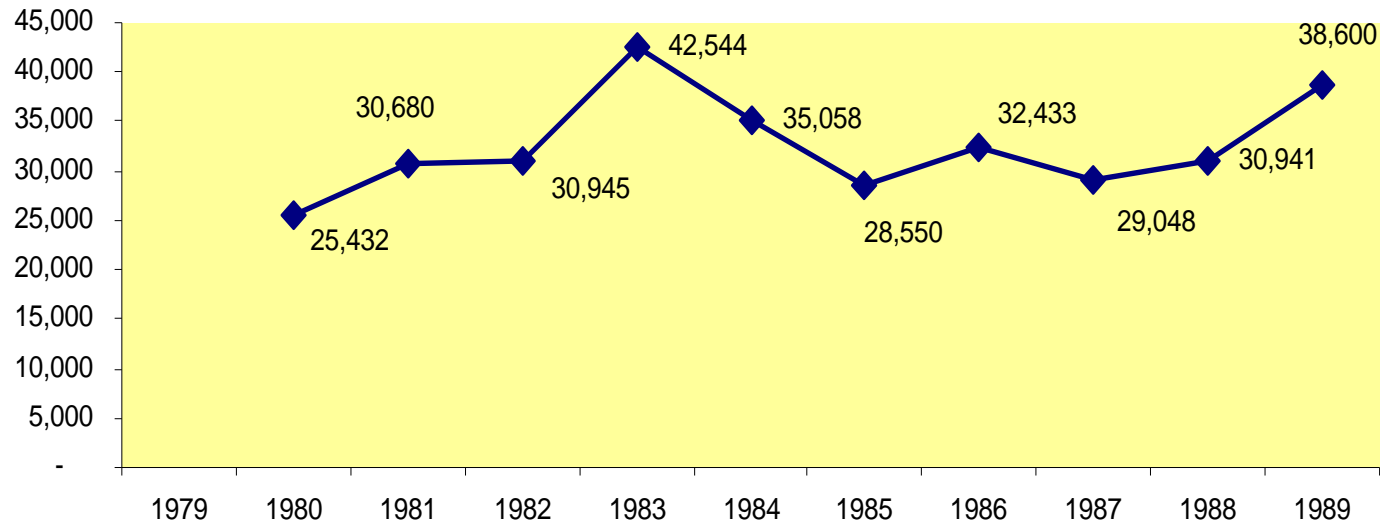


Growth of DRA Forces

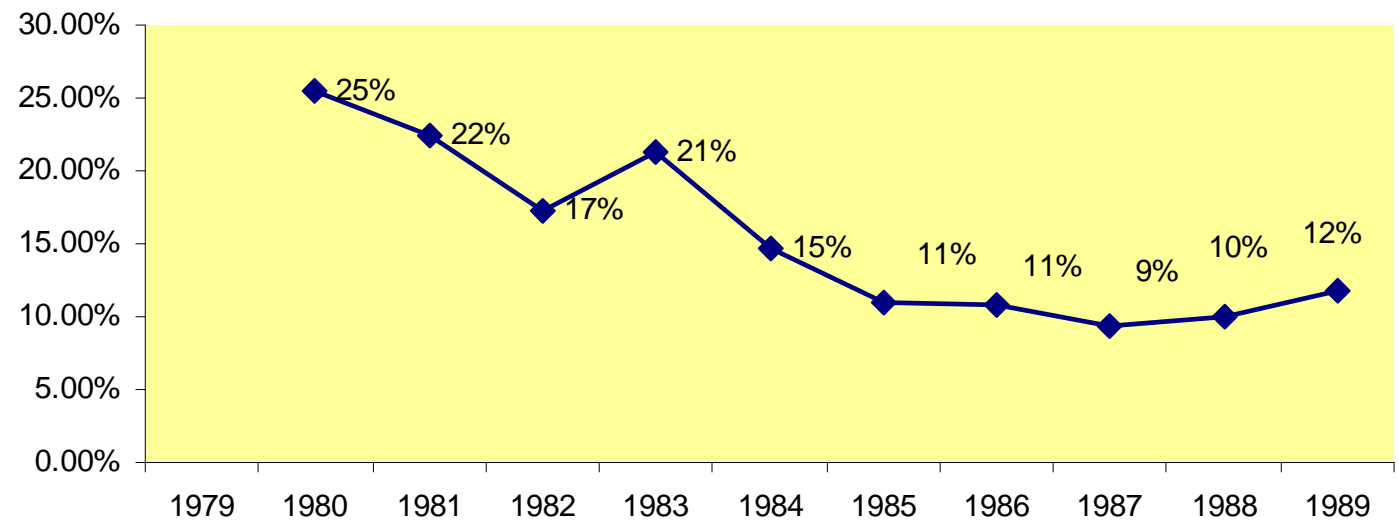


Desertion Rates

Number of Desertions per Year



Percent Desertions per Year





DRA Forces breakdown (1988)

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| • Government Forces | | • Militia on the side of government | |
| – Army | 90,000 | – Tribal | 62,000 |
| – Border Guards | 42,000 | – GDR | 35,000 |
| – Gendarmerie | 96,700 | – Self-defence | 53,000 |
| – KhaD | 68,700 | | |
| – Special Guards | 11,500 | | |
| • Total | 308,900 | • Total | 150,000 |

Grand Total 458,900



Force Level to Population Ratio Comparison

- Afghanistan (1988)
 - **26:1,000** (Soviet + DRA forces)
- Iraq (May 2008)
 - **22:1,000** (26:1,000 including Sons of Iraq).
- Afghanistan (2009)
 - **7.6:1,000**
- Required as per past COIN experience
 - **425,000 – 640,000**



DRA Air Force





Women in DRA Forces



Female village self-defence
group



DRA Air Force woman officer at Lycee graduation
ceremony in Baghram, Autumn, 1987.



Soviet soldiers with the local self-defence unit, Badahshan



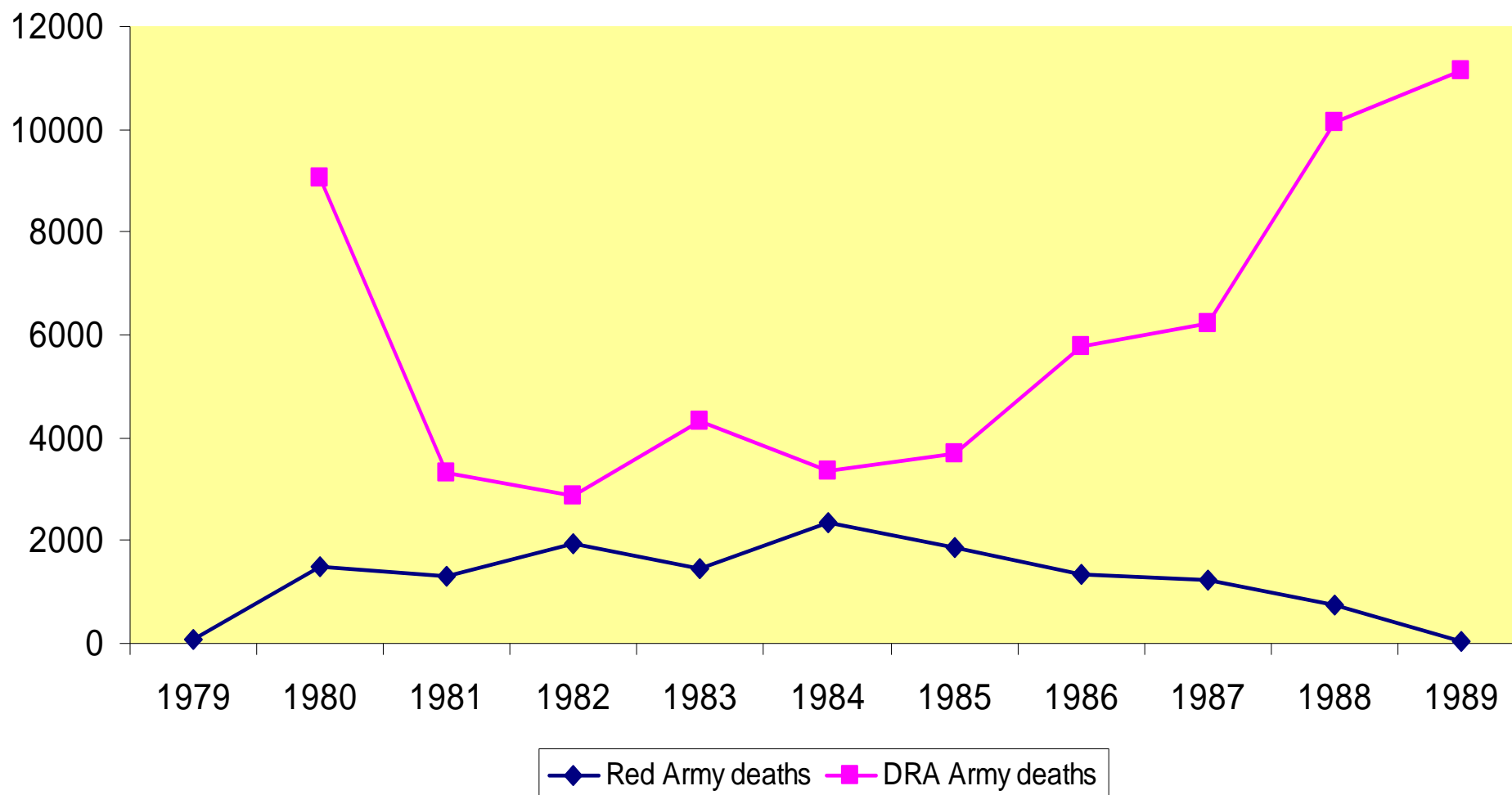


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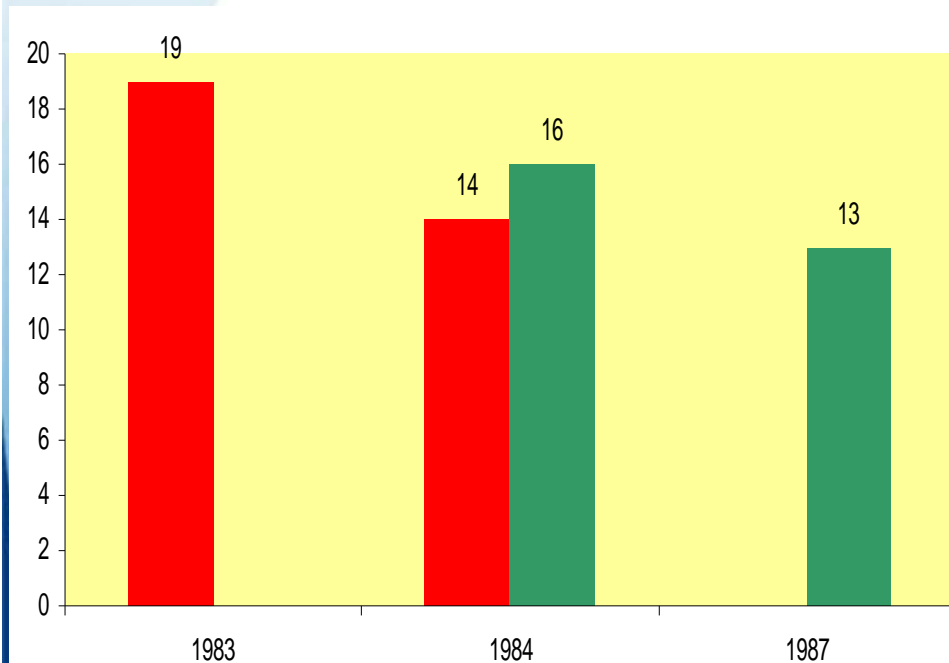
Soviet and DRA Forces Deaths





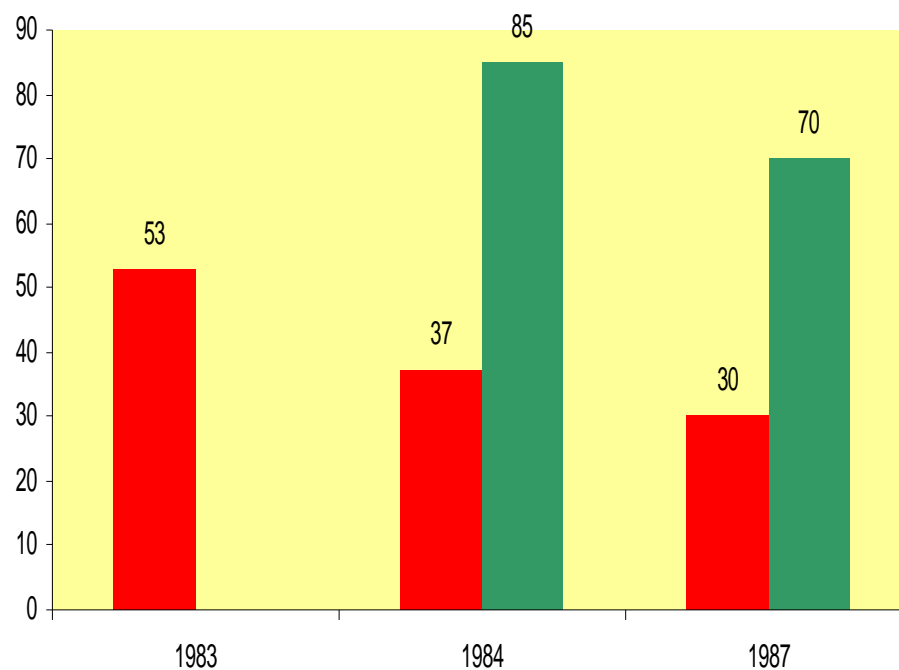
Border Sealing Activities

Ambushes (daily)



■ By Soviet
■ By DRA

Caravan Interceptions (monthly)





Soviet – Afghan joint operation





Handing Battalion's Position to the Afghan Army





Joint operation with KhaD
captures a mujahidin leader



KhaD officers with
captured mujahidins



Afghan and Soviet troops in ambush position



After successful operation, Parwan, April 1987



Adjustments - Tactical

- Tactics devised to minimize losses
- Armed group concept
- Bounding overwatch
- Improvement of air assault and helicopter gunship tactics
- Enveloping detachments
- Use of special forces



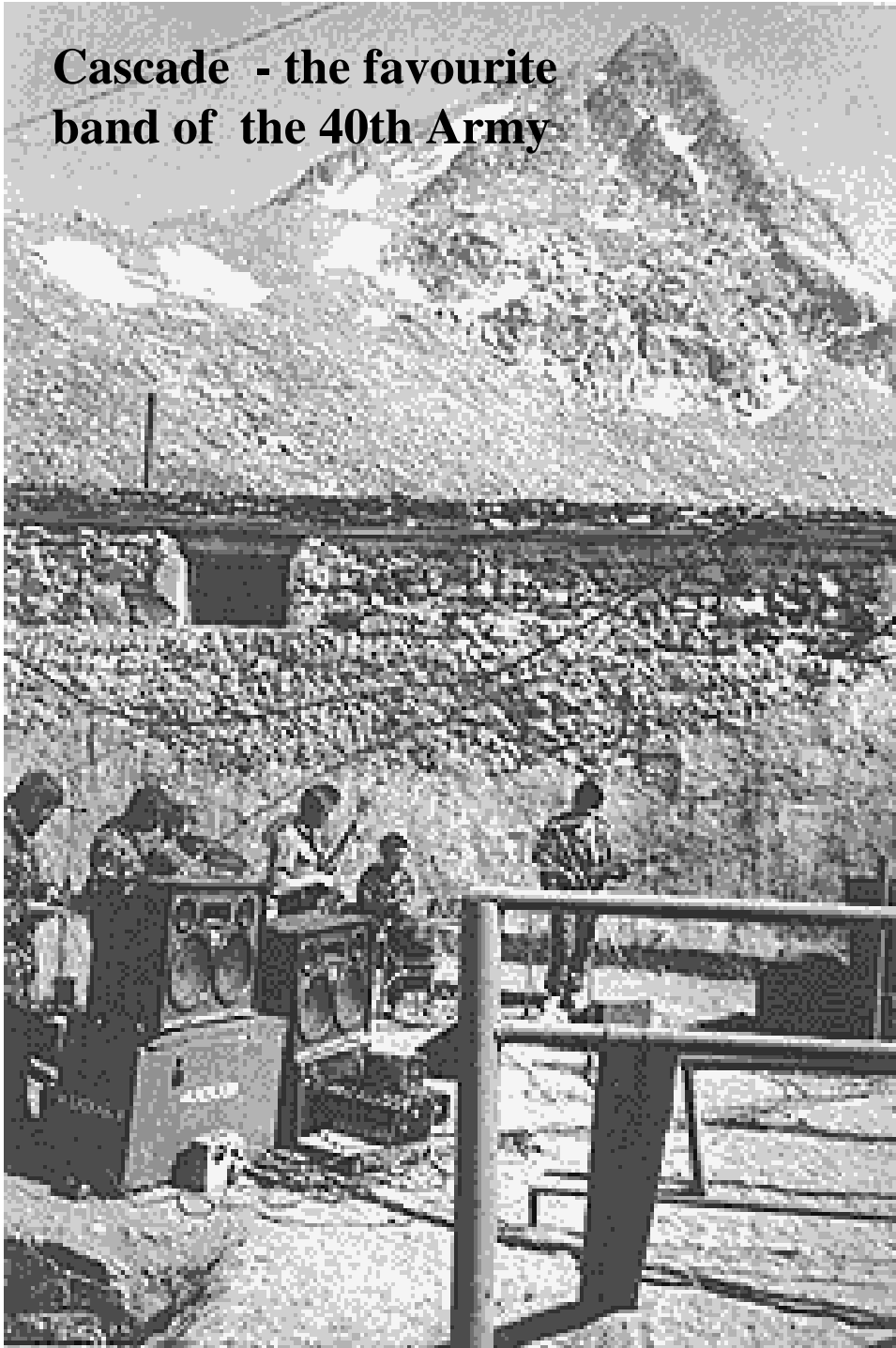
66 Reconnaissance company. Jalalabad



Spteznaz in action: Destroying a supply caravan, 1987



**Cascade - the favourite
band of the 40th Army**



Galina Podzarev, an actor from Moscow





Adjustment - Force Structure

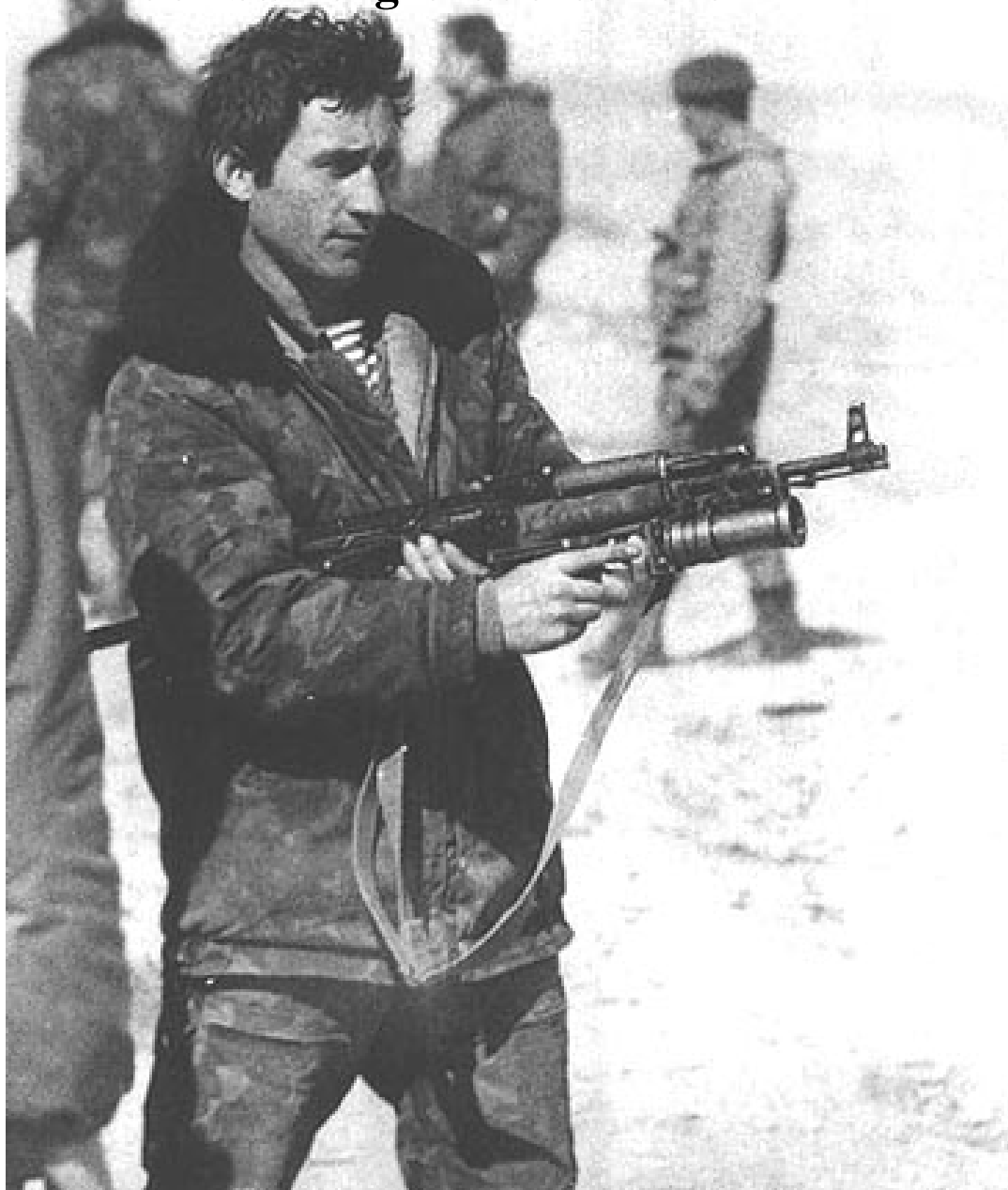
- Shift to smaller, independent units
 - 7 divisions \Rightarrow 4 divisions + independent units
- Withdrawal of tank and anti-aircraft regiments
- Decentralization of fire support and assets
 - shifted from army and division level to battalion level
- Air power, air mobility used as a force multiplier
 - helicopters increased from 50 to 300
- Use of special forces
 - 20% of all Red Army special forces



Adjustment - Equipment and Training

- New systems tested and introduced
 - personnel carriers, helicopters and helicopter gunships, but not tanks
- Improvements to infantry's personal gear and firepower
- Specialized mountain warfare training schools

**The GP-25 "Koster" ("Bonfire")
under-barrel grenade launcher**



The RPG-18 "Mukha" ("Fly")





Social and State Development

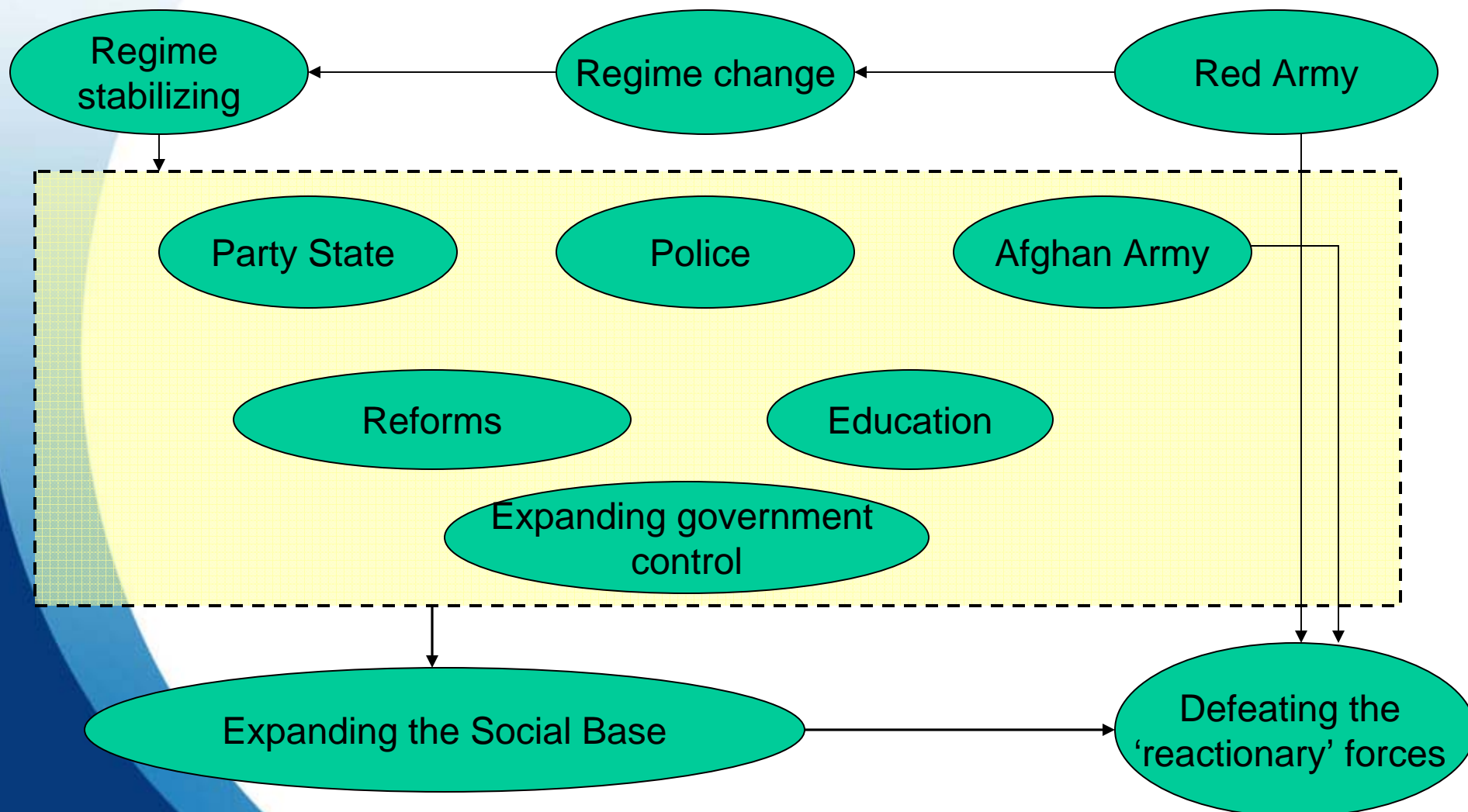


Traditional Functions of State in Islam

- External security (against enemy forces)
- Justice
- Ensuring overall support for Muslim institutions and religion
- Policing, social justice, education, health
 - responsibility of individual communities and Islamic charities (waqf)



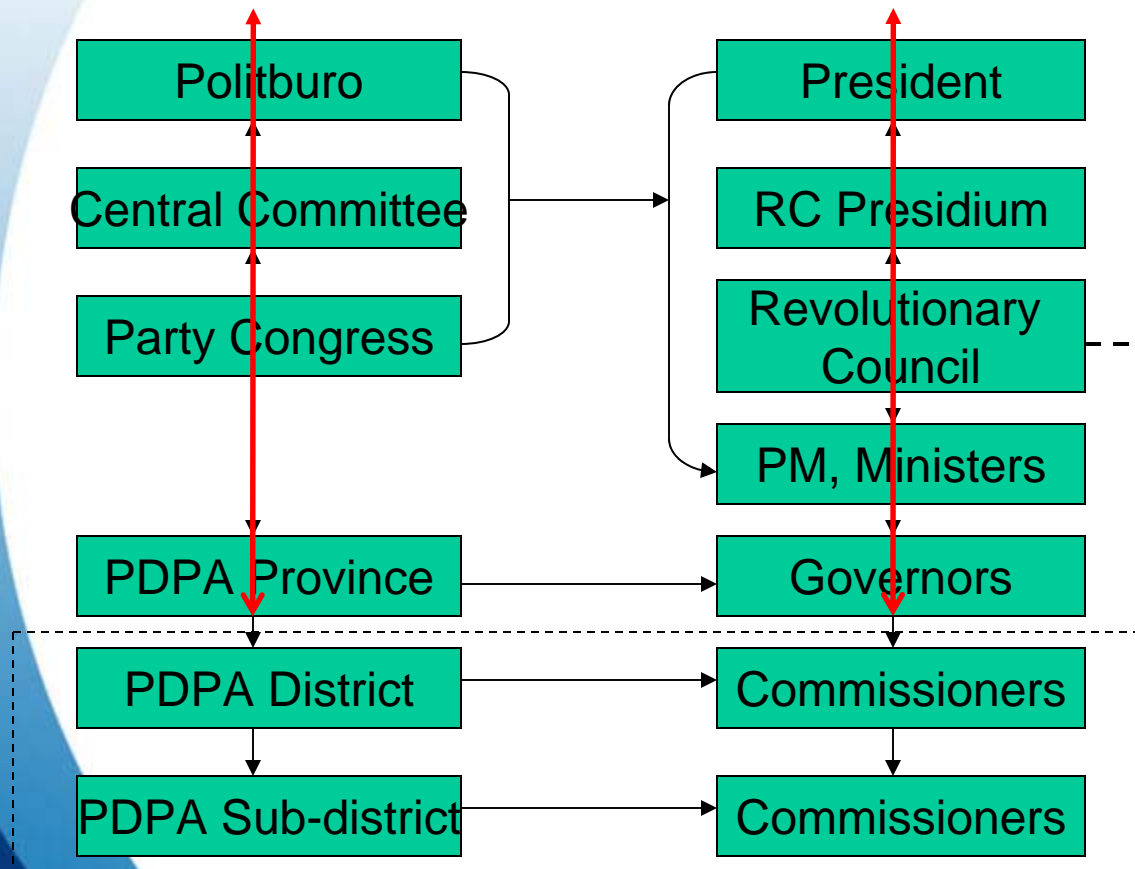
Development: State Building Strategy





The Afghan Party State

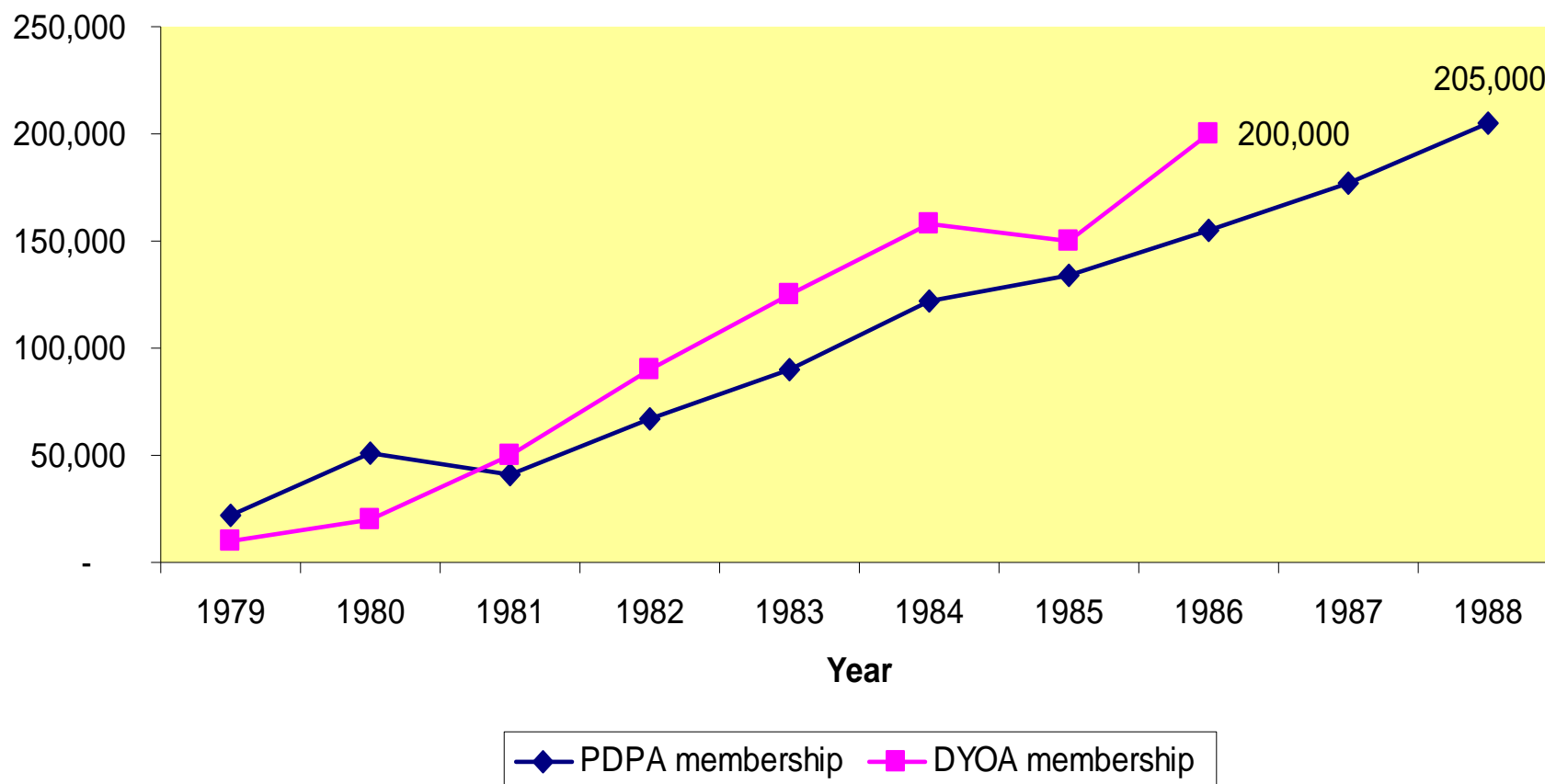
PDPA Structure





Growth of PDPA

PDPA and DYOA Membership Growth





Activists of the Afghan Women's Democratic Organization





Secretary of the local Committee of the PDPA, Kalay-Dana, Parwan, 1986



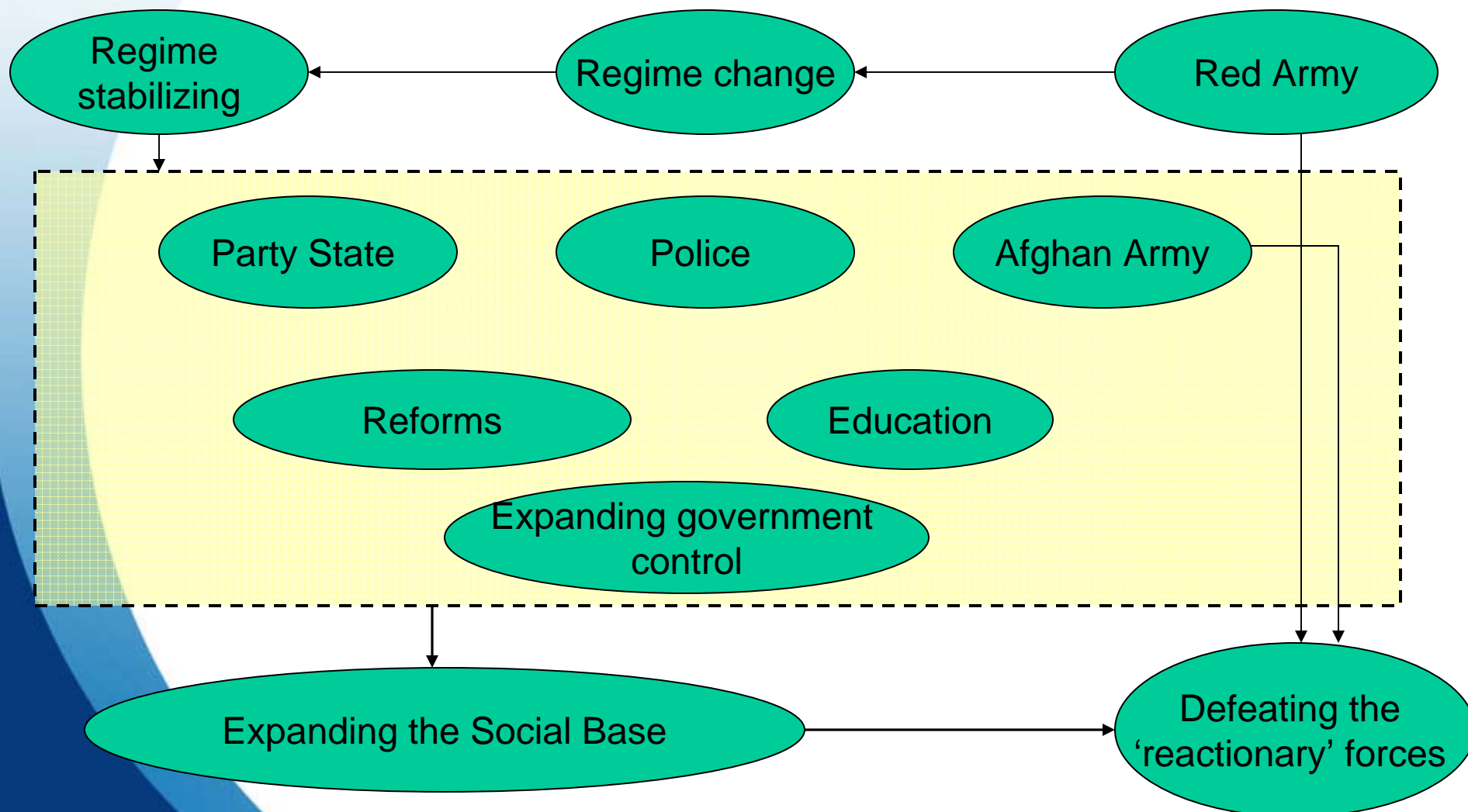


“Delivery” of PDPA activists in Parwan, 1987





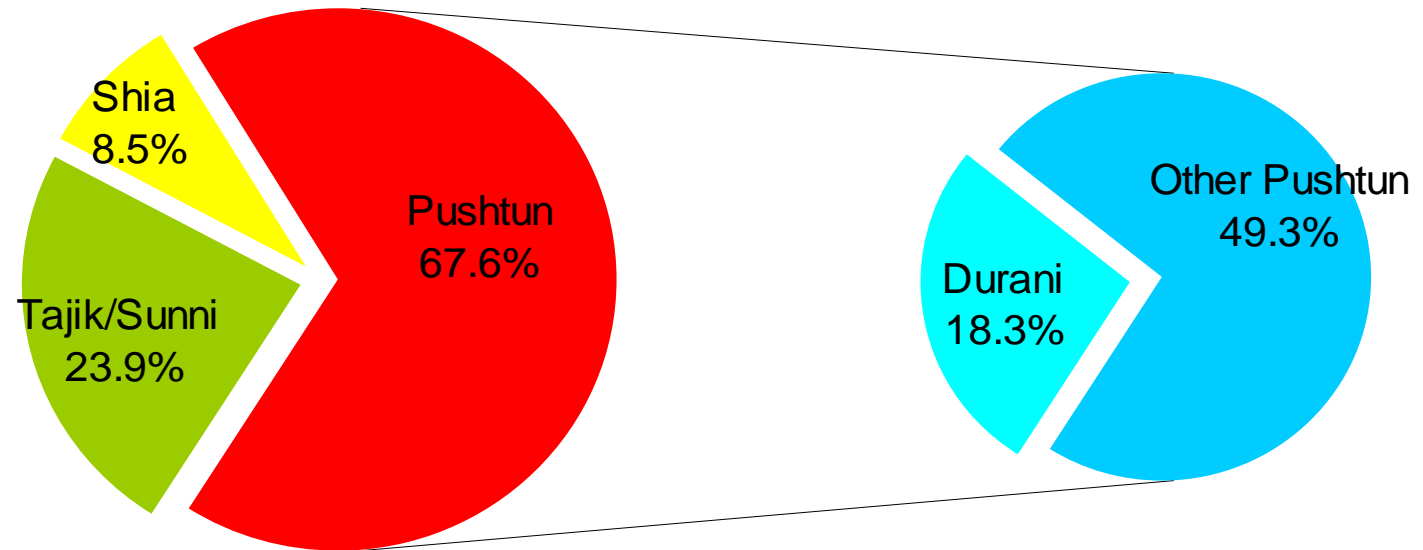
Development: State Building Strategy





Ethnic Politics

- Ethnic equality guaranteed in 1964
- Khalq and Parcham – ethnic composition

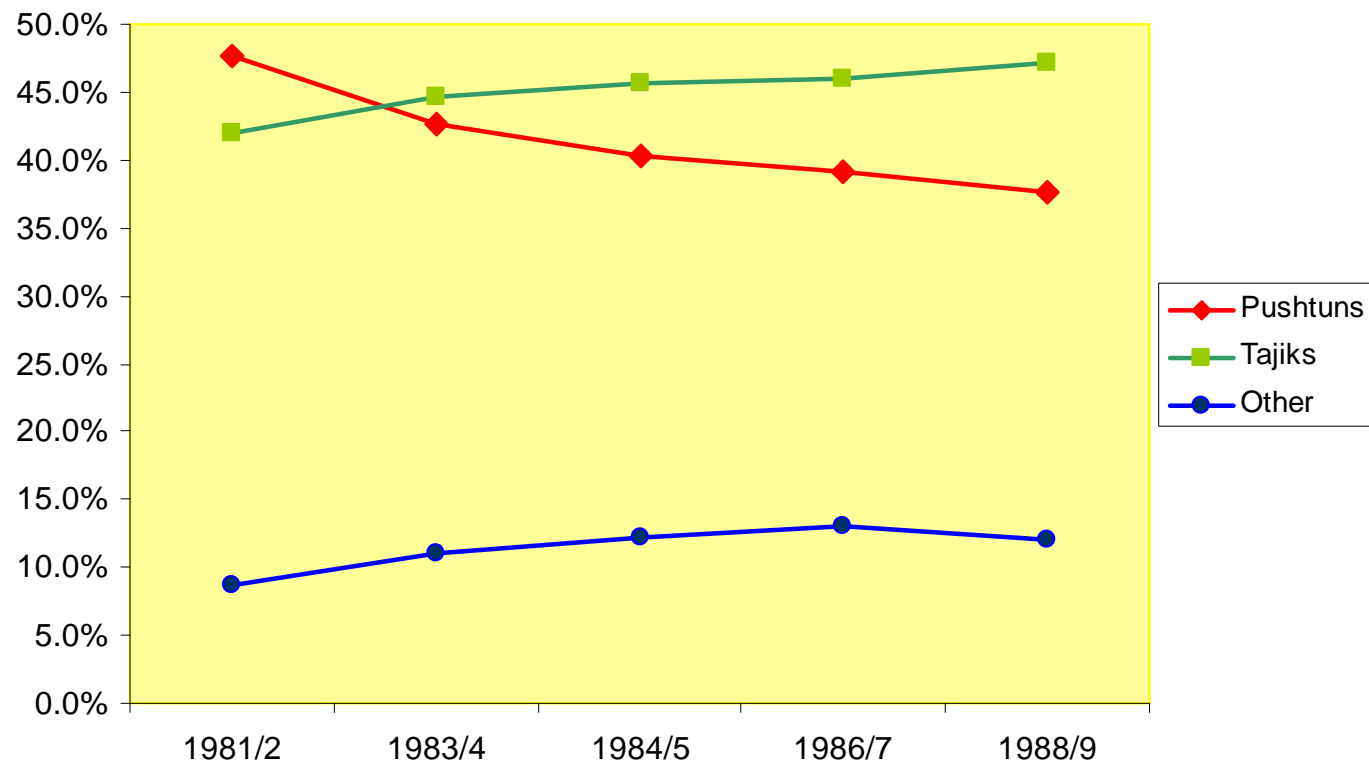


- Language reforms as ethnic politics



Ethnic Policies and Counterinsurgency

- Ethnic Favourism



Ethnic Composition of PDPA

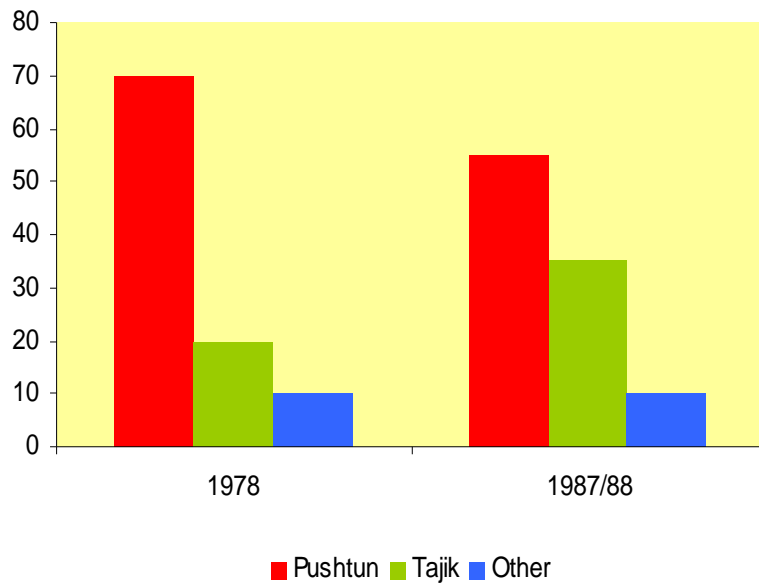


From Ethnic Rivalry to Ethnic War

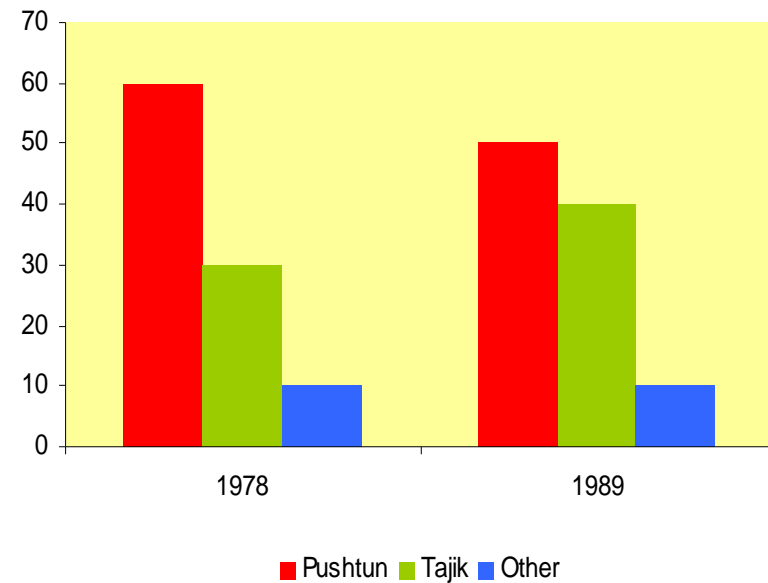
- Ethnic policies changed the balance of power

Ethnic Composition of the DRA Army

Senior Officers

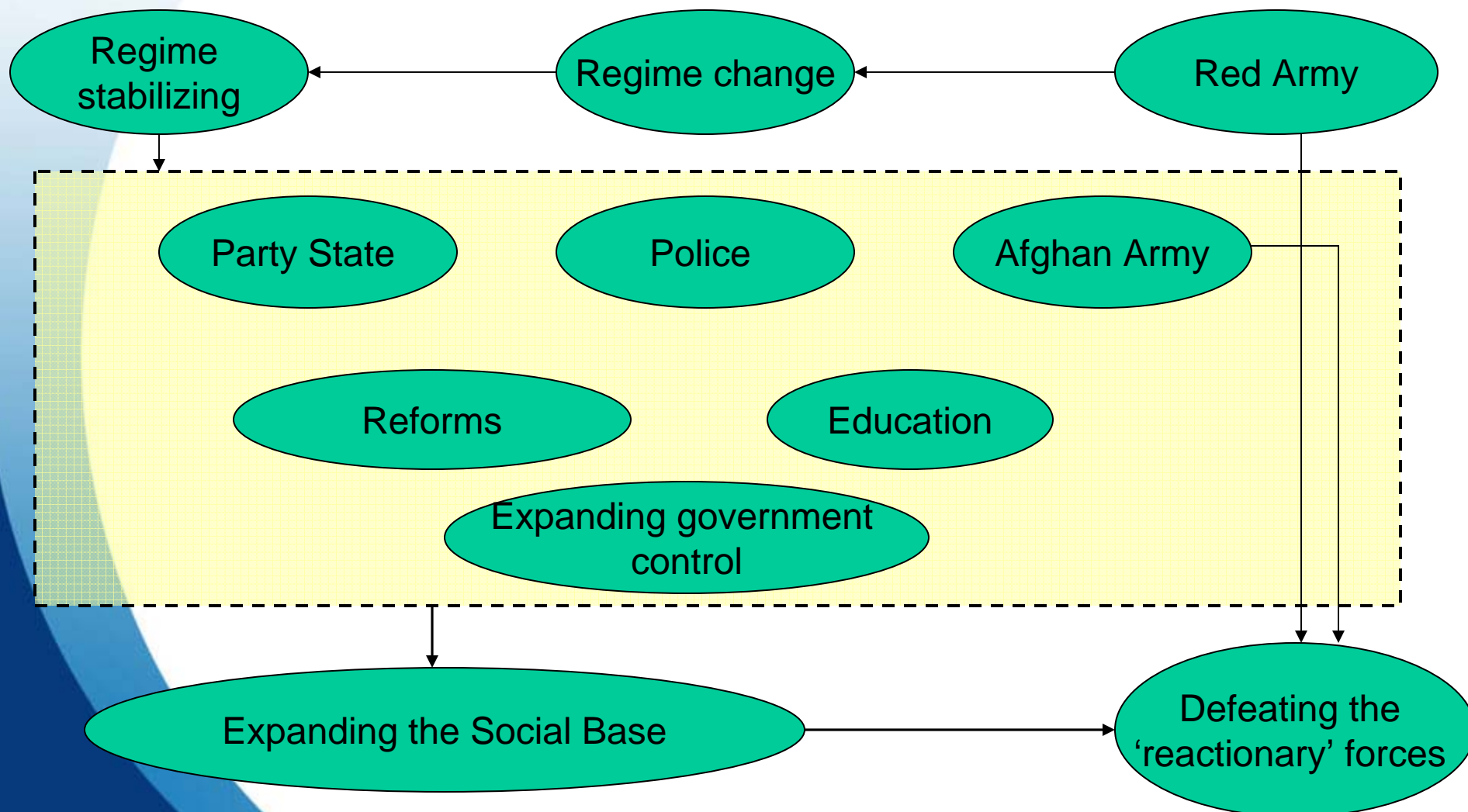


Troops



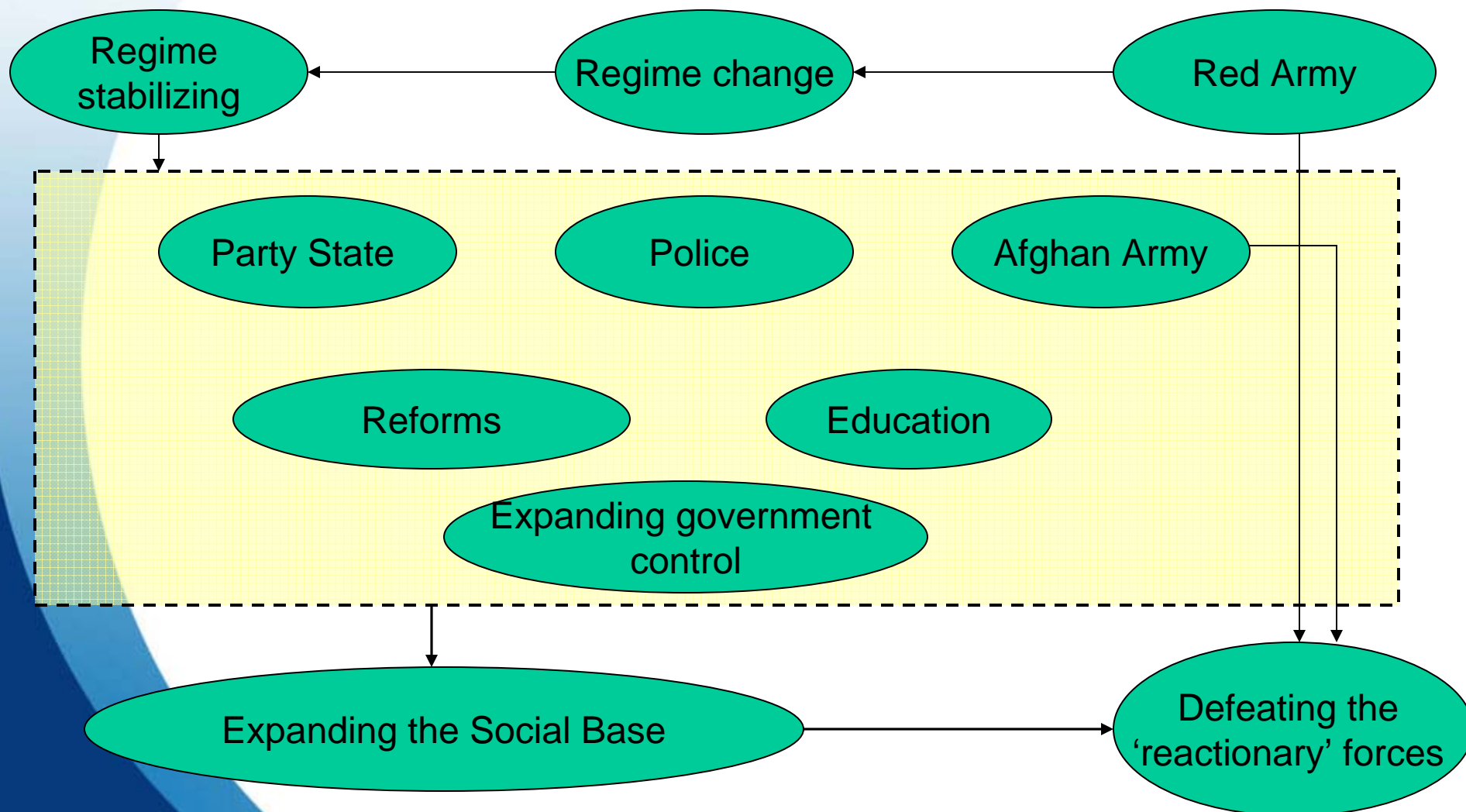


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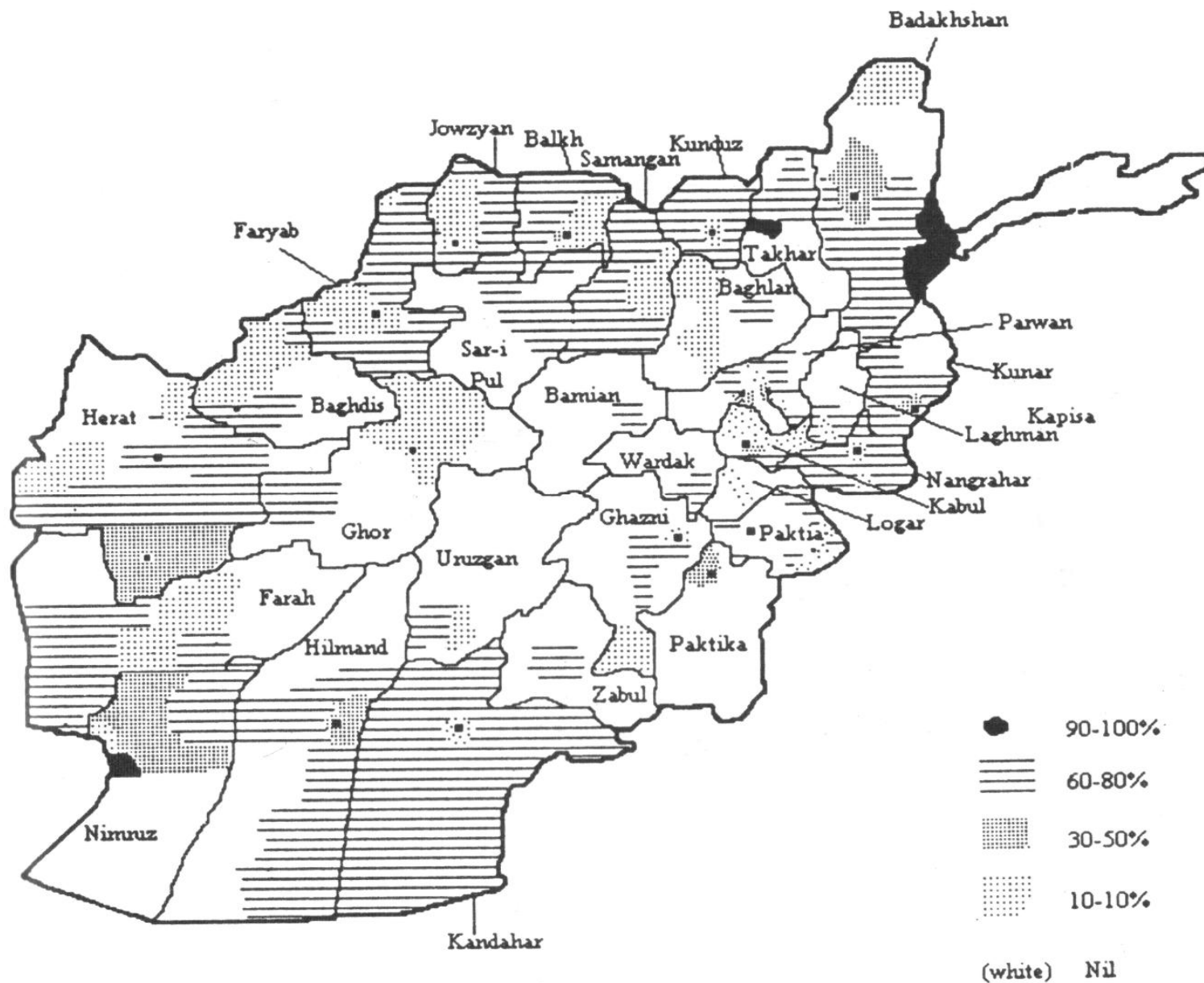


Development: State Building Strategy



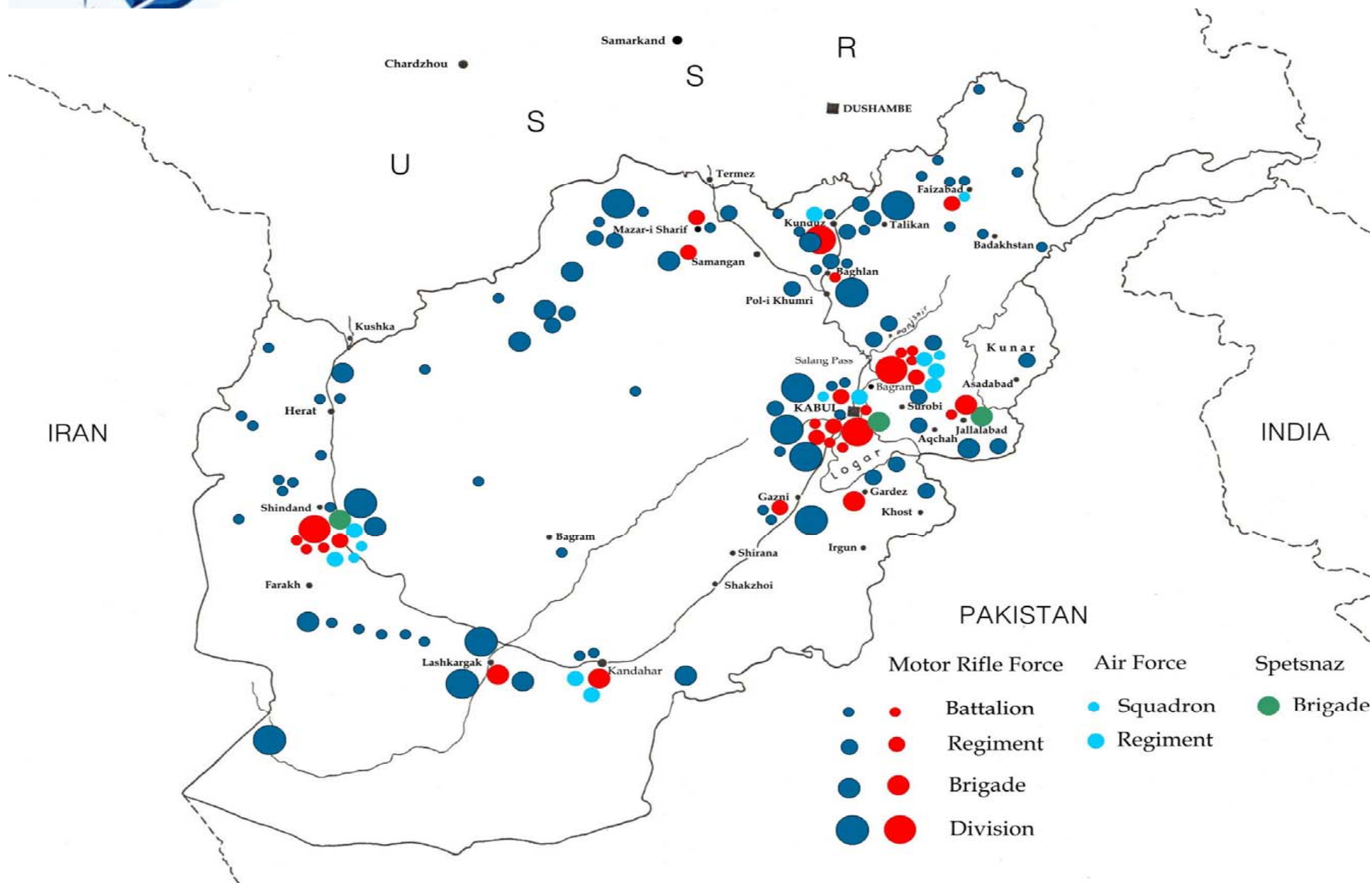


Government Control, 1988



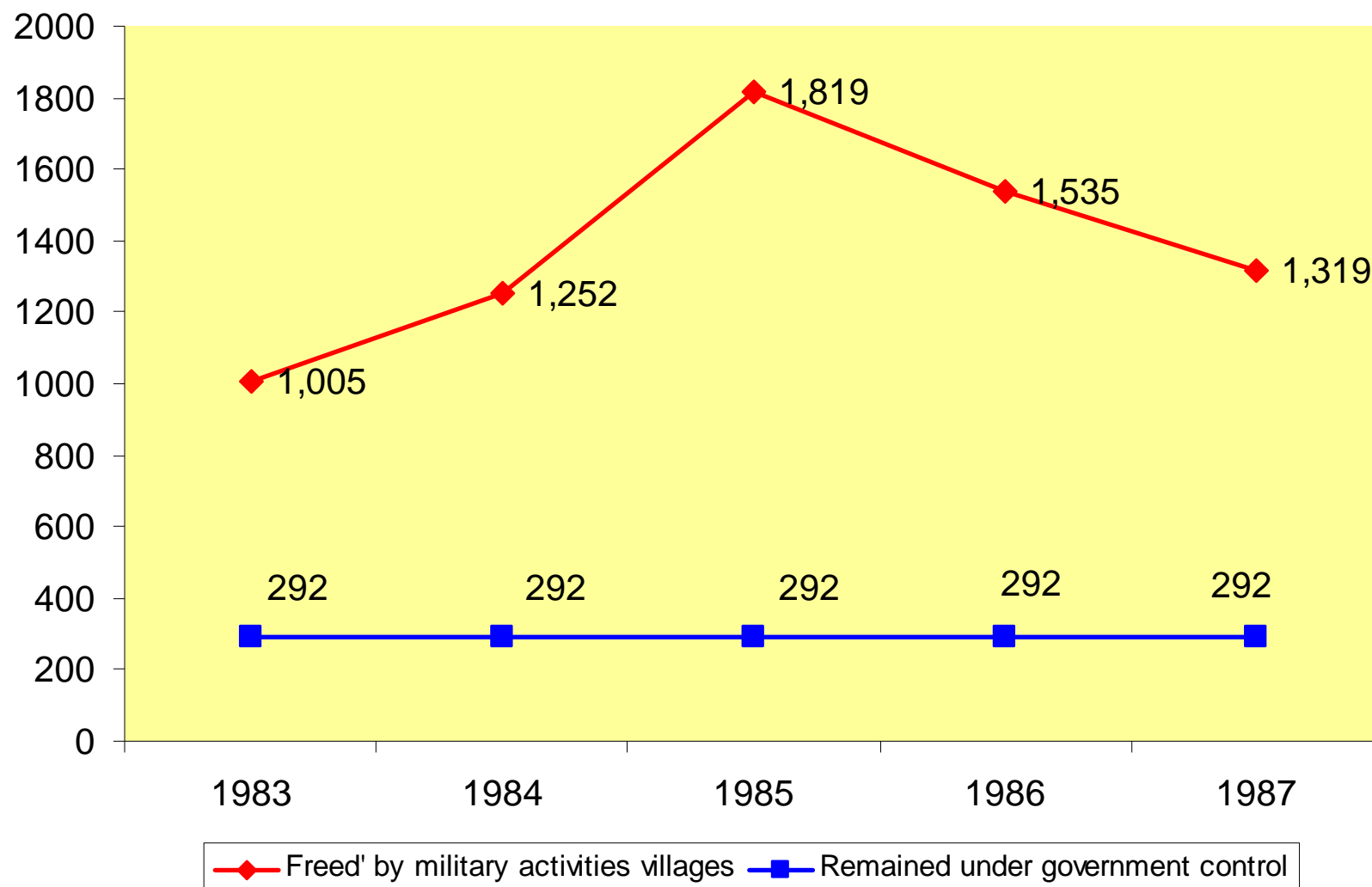


Soviet and DRA Bases



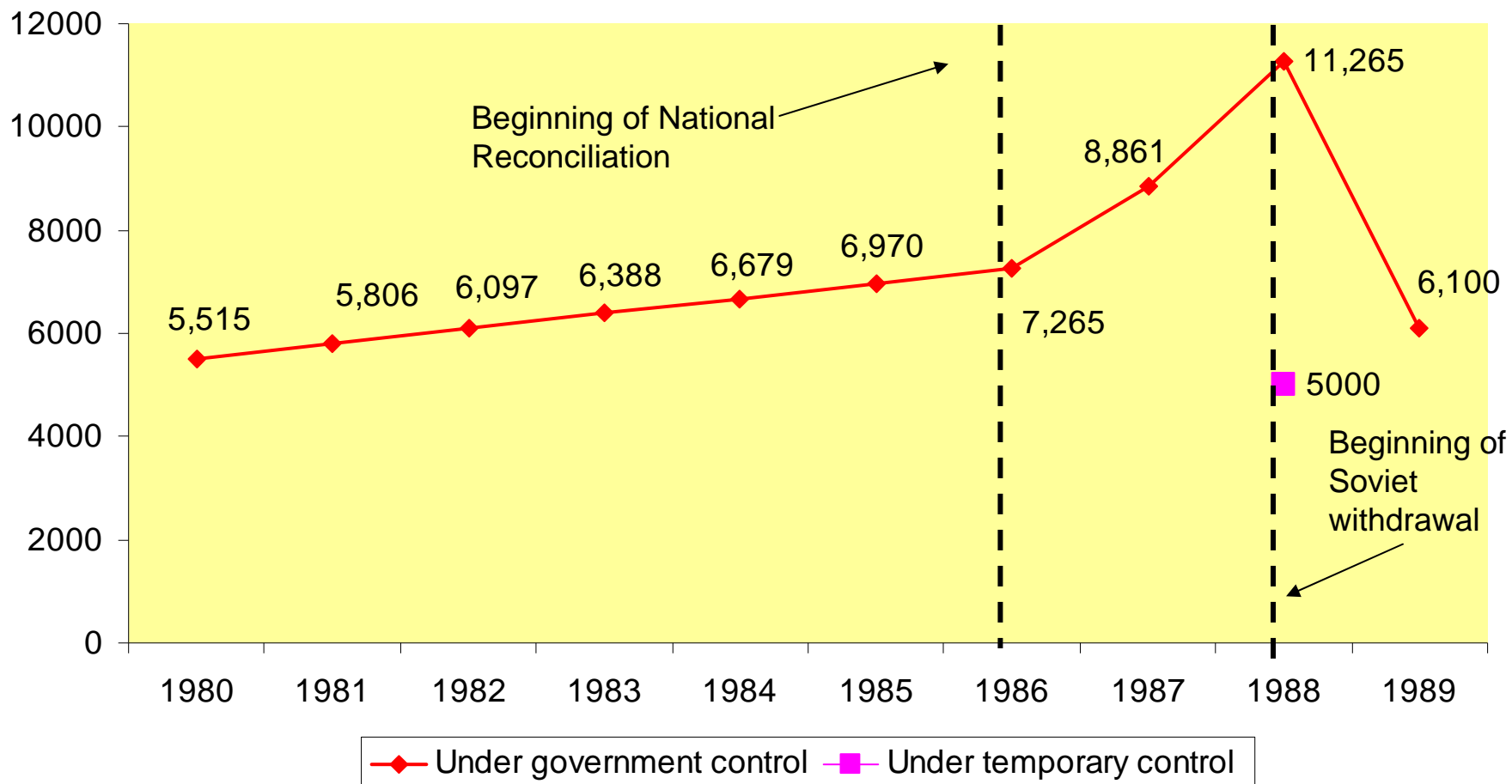


Limits of Military ‘Pacification’





Number of Villages under Government Control





Diplomacy: Internal

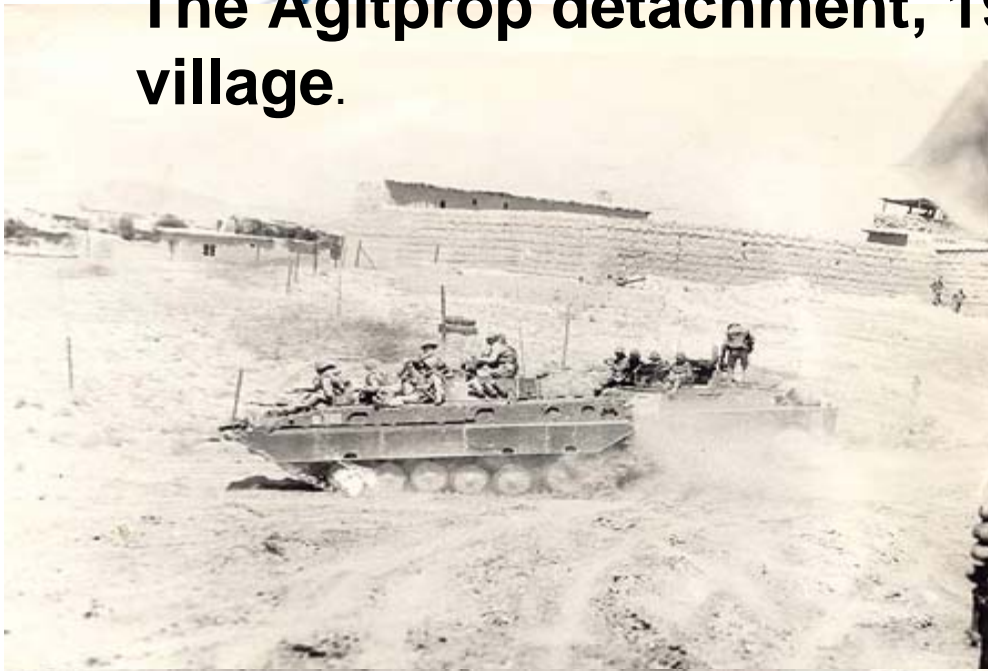
- Unifying PDPA's factions
- Pacification Policy
 - agreements with local leaders and mujahidin
- Loya and local Jirgas (1985, 1988)
- Integrating the ulema (religious scholars) within state run religious system
- Agitprop (CIMIC)
- Promotion of national reconciliation and unity



Agitprop

- Part of force structure
- Composition
 - Military staff
 - Medical personnel
 - Party representatives
 - Entertainers
- Function
 - Spread of information, distribution of fuel, food, medical help, reconnaissance, negotiations
- Initiative gradually “Afghanized”

The Agitprop detachment, 1987. Parwan Province. Durani village.





Meeting devoted to the 68-th Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1986



Movie watching. 1986



Fuel distribution, 1986



Agitprop of the 108th MRD, 1985



Change of Strategy: National Reconciliation

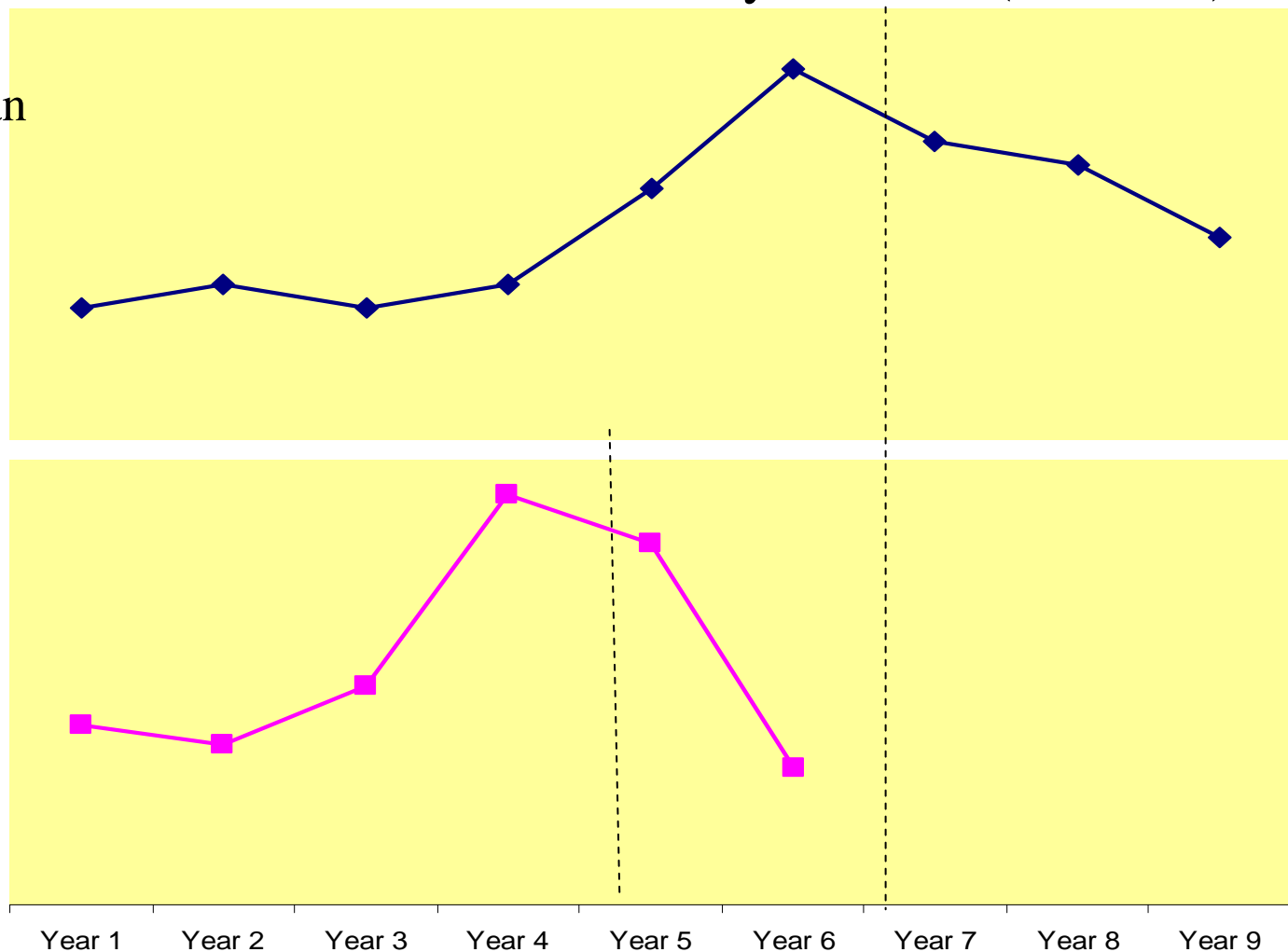
- Launched in 1986
- More inclusive government
- Reversal of controversial reforms
- Socialism replaced with nationalism
- Promoting Islamic character of the state
- Accommodating and buying off resistance commanders
 -but not challenging their authority



Results - Civilian Casualties

- Civilian deaths decrease by 65-70% (1986-87)

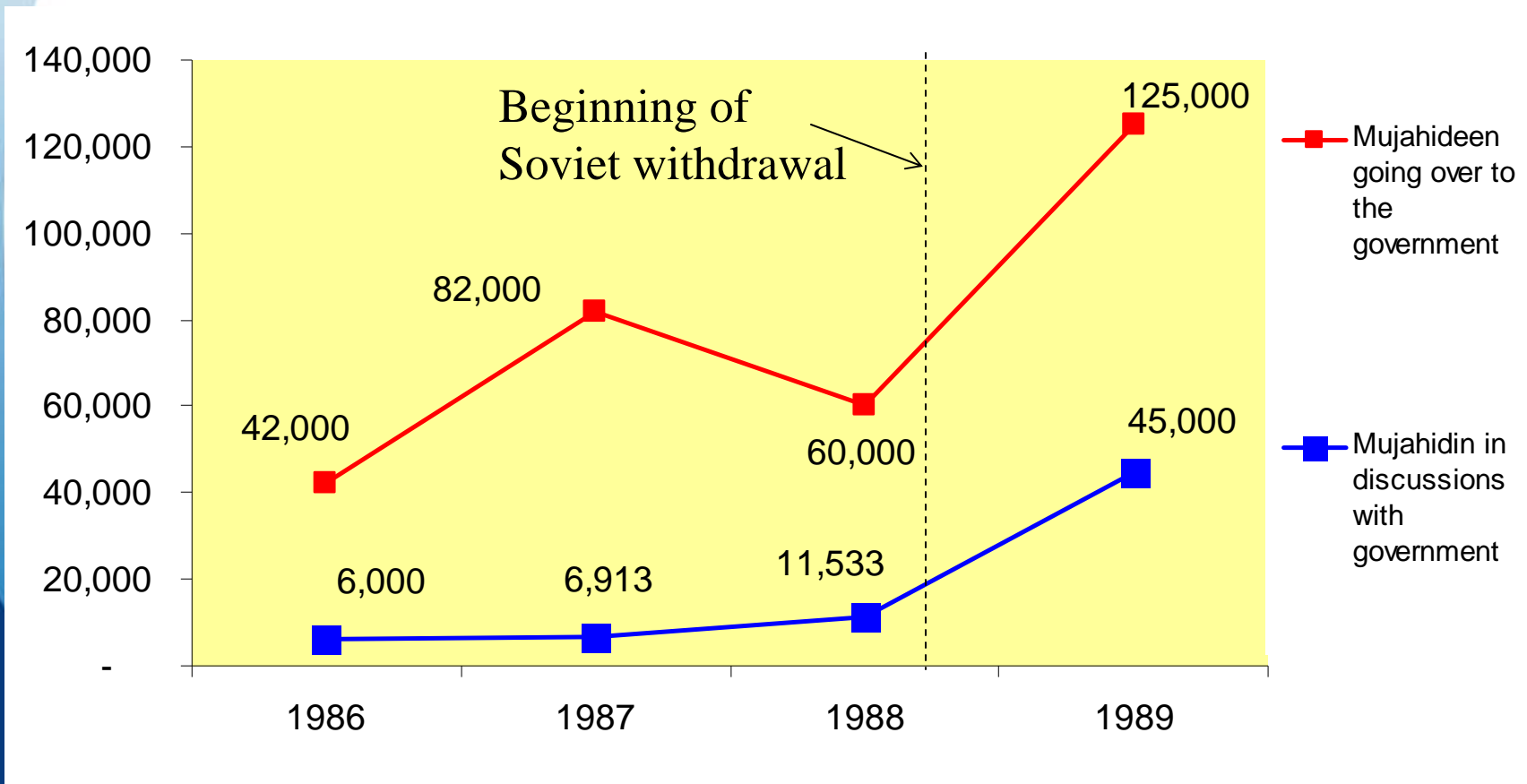
Afghanistan





Results - Reconciliation Process, 1986-89

- By 1990, 25% of all non-government armed units had signed “reconciliation” agreements and 40% ceasefire agreements





Development: Economic

- Extensive prior Soviet economic investment
- Increasing the state share of national income
 - 1975 -10%; 1988 - 20% of GDP
 - in manufacturing - 80%
 - in the construction sector – 90%
 - in transportation – 60%
 - Oil and gas exploration – 100%
- Domestic revenue, excluding sales of natural gas
 - Growth of 142 % from 1977 to 1989 (13% per year)



Development: Agriculture

- 60% of GDP, source of income for 80% of population
- Land reforms counterproductive
- Overemphasis on cooperatives, state farms
- Object of contention
 - cash crops vs. foodstuffs
- Target of the counterinsurgency strategy
 - 20% of villages destroyed
- Ultimate result – destruction, import of foodstuffs
- Opium production

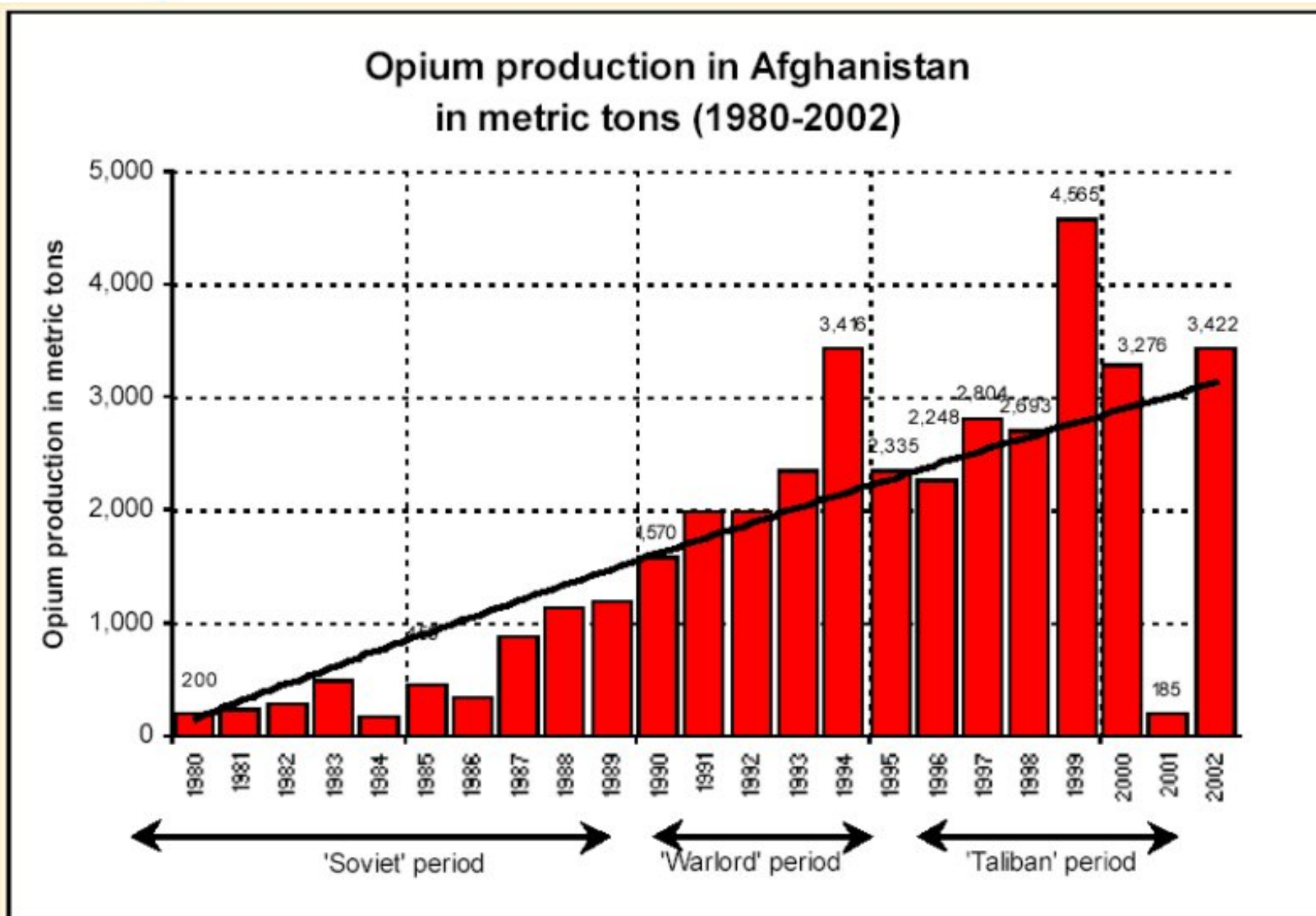


Figure 1

Source: UNDCP, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2001 and 2002* and UNDCP/ICMP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002*.

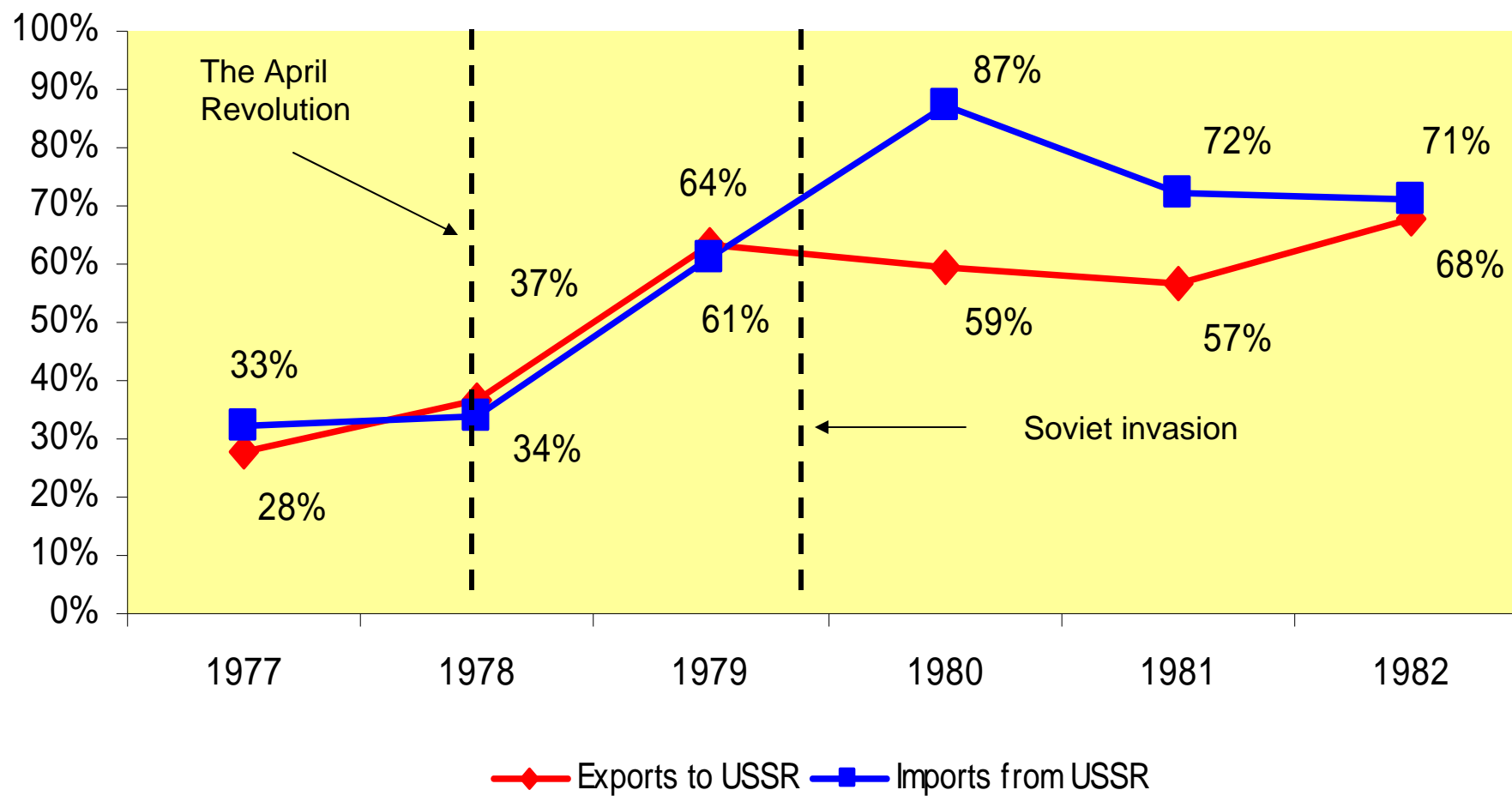


Development: Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
- Gas exports, mining
 - Exports at below market prices to USSR
 - Soviet technicians
- Manufacturing not encouraged
- Economic integration
- Economy survives on foreign aid
- Corruption



Trade



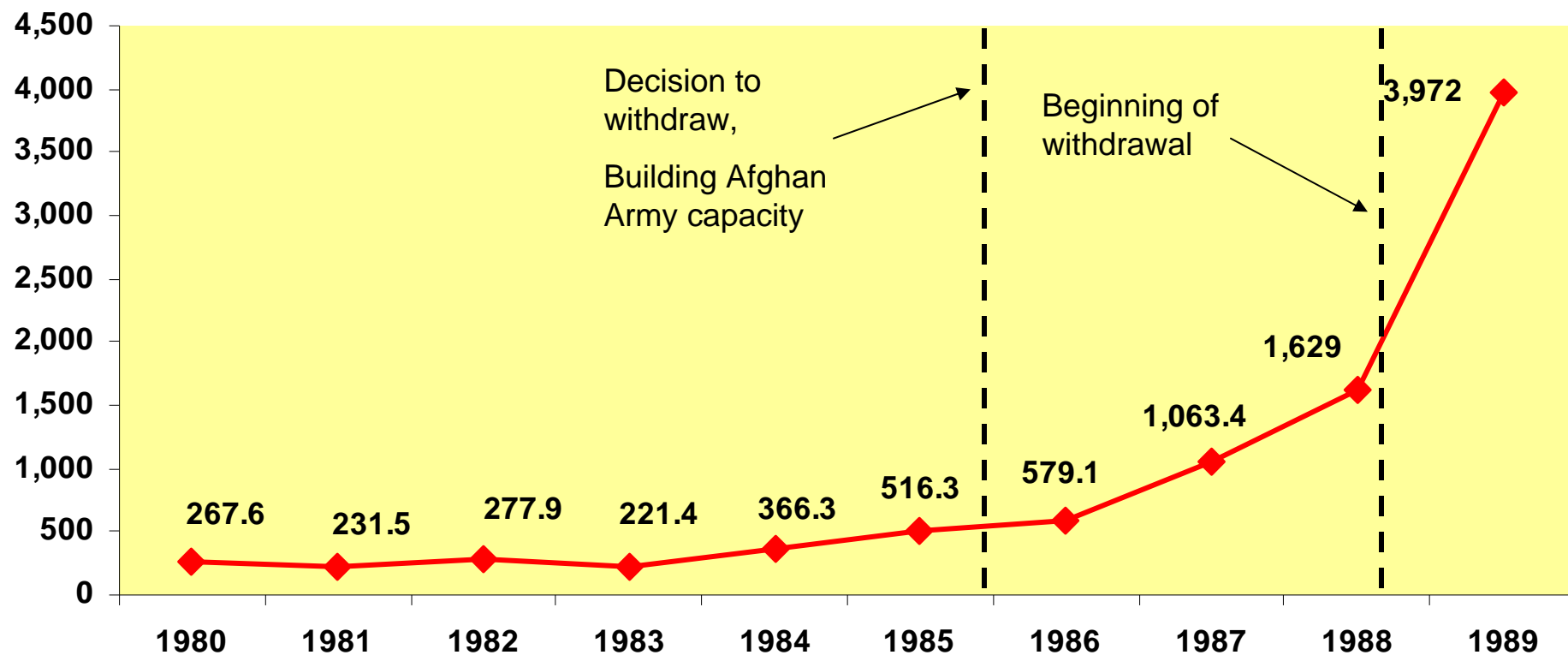


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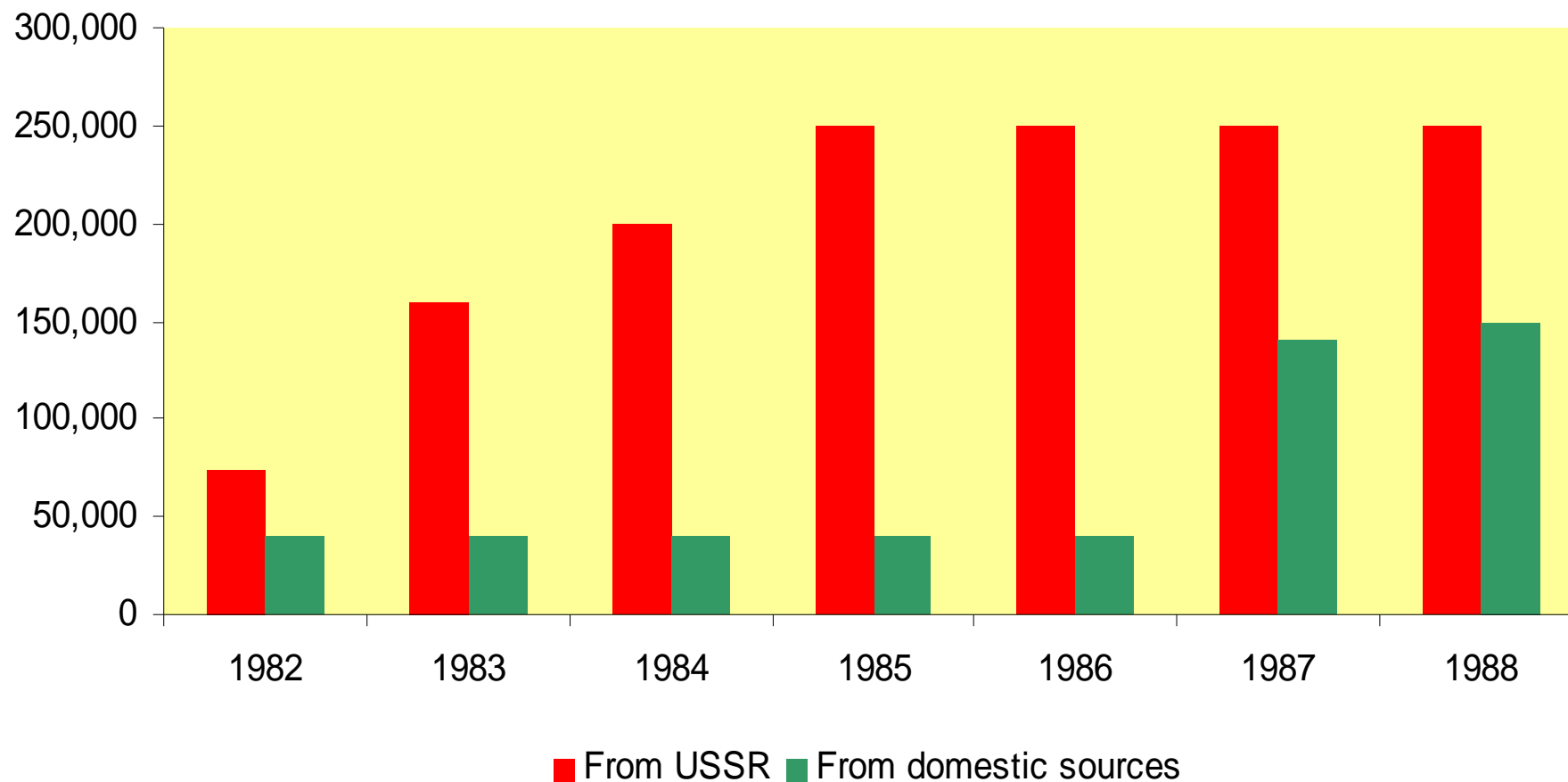


Soviet Military Aid (in Millions of Rubles)



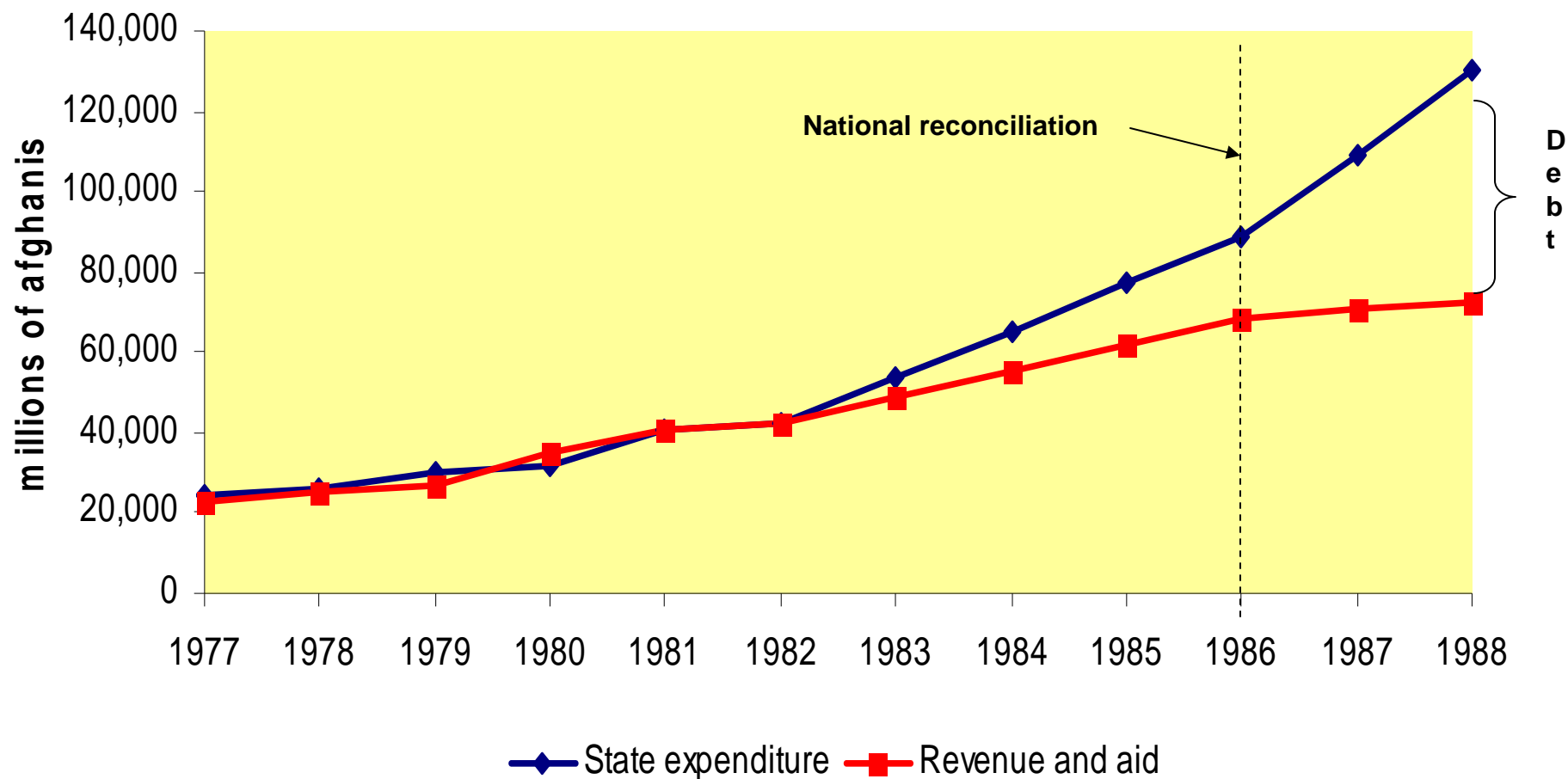


Wheat Supply (in tons)





Expenditures and Revenue

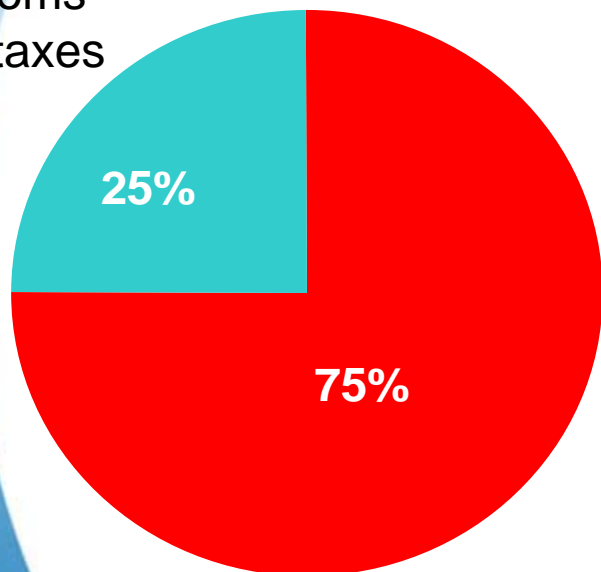




Sources of State Revenue

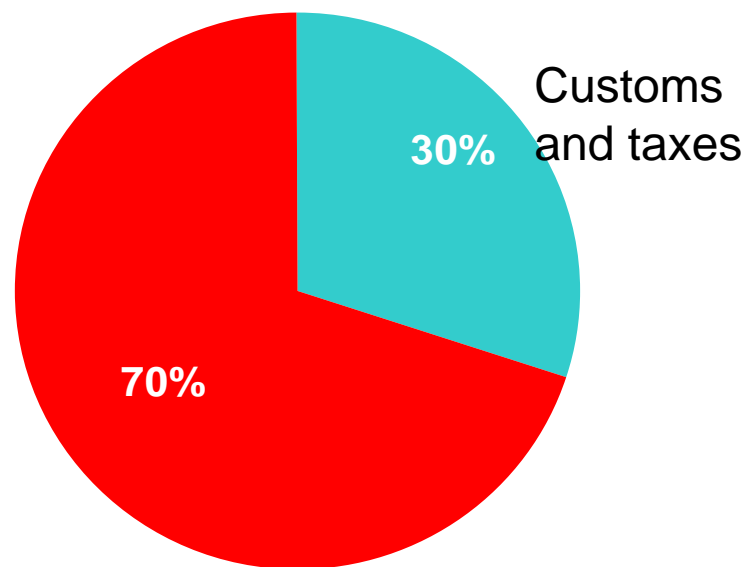
State Income, 1988

Customs
and taxes



Natural Gas
sales, financial
aid

State Income, 1991



Soviet
Financial Aid



Economic Aid Comparison

- Afghanistan (1980-1989)
 - Soviet aid (converted in 2007 dollars) - \$29.7 billion, **\$1,980** per capita
- Afghanistan (2002-2009)
 - Disbursed US and international aid - \$44.4 billion, **\$1,346** per capita
- Iraq (2003-2008)
 - Combined international aid to Iraq - \$73.4 billion, **\$2,622** per capita



Defeat or Strategic Withdrawal?

- Decision for withdrawal made in 1985
 - Based on shift of Party's global strategy
- DRA army demonstrates increasing capacity
- National Reconciliation progressing
- Effects of Red Army withdrawal are positive
- The Regime survives
 - ... but depends on foreign aid
 - ... and is weakened by ethnic conflict



Lessons (to be) learned

- Denying sanctuary in Pakistan impossible with a “limited contingent”
- Red Army’s battlefield victories could not be translated into strategic success
- Level of political commitment is more important
- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement

.... but runs the risk of perpetuating local power centers that challenge central authority

- Secular values conflict with Afghan traditional values
- Is strong, centralized, democratic Afghanistan feasible?



Lessons (to be) learned – Exit strategy

- Red Army withdrawal removed a principal cause of war for the insurgents
- The policy of “National Reconciliation” was more successful than military operations
- Building Afghan security forces was a viable exit strategy
- Focus on long term economic sustainability is most important
- Keep supporting a friendly regime in Kabul at all costs





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